

Monthly Update

December 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We save the news of what is happening in our United Methodist Church until next month. You will find tidbits about Christmas since this season should be a time of peace and joy. A change in this year's December Update is that we composed it so that if you wish to copy it and hand it out to others – or insert it in Christmas cards for family and friends – you may do so. It might be that you could use it to brighten up someone else's life with the Christmas insights that are included. Another thing you will notice is that some of the material is the same; we included it because we wanted to make it rich with meaning for those who may be lonely, depressed, or feeling that this year seems to be “stale” and boring. As I travel, I pull into gas stations or highway rest stops, go up to each car or person there, and ask, “Would you like to have a Christmas Card?” Invariably, their faces light up as they take it. One year after I had given them out in a Waffle House then grabbed a bite to eat, one of the guys walked up and told me, “Don't worry about your meal. I took care of it.” I thanked him for this unexpected blessing.

In the November Update we had outlined some of the challenges we face in leading up to next year's 2020 General Conference (GC2020) in Minneapolis. To reiterate:

I want to lay out our projected needs all the way up to GC2020. Then I would ask that you pray as to how you might be led to support our effort. For us, we are pulling out all stops – just as in 2009 when we fought the harmful “Separation Amendments” that came out of the disastrous 2008 General Conference in Ft. Worth. Remember, all of them went down in flames to defeat – despite the best efforts of our church leadership.

We plan to: send out at least two issues of The Christian Methodist Newsletter to approximately 17,000 people, churches, and conferences around the world; send out a special mailing that we believe will have a positive effect to all General Conference 2020 delegates around the world; and [cover the cost of] General Conference expenses in Minneapolis – in addition to maintaining our regular ministry that include operations/publishing our Monthly Updates. We estimate that these expenses will total approximately \$27,740 – with printing and postage...being considerable expenses.

We have stressed the importance of your help in the crises facing our United Methodist Church. I firmly believe that from now to May 5–15, 2020 is a “window of decision” that will determine the future of our church: will it remain an orthodox Christian church, or will it become like the other hierarchical Mainline denominations that have caved in to the homosexual agenda? Please pray as to how you might help.

In addition, we make the most efficient use possible of your donations. Since we have no paid employees and minimize overhead, we translate the maximum amount of your contributions to our ministry of telling people about what is happening in our church.

From all of us here we wish you a very merry Christmas!

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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December 2019 Update

As we do in December, we offer this to you in the hopes that it will help to make your Christmas brighter, happier, and more appreciative of all the good things we enjoy. When we think back to what happened 2,000 years ago and what it means to us, it helps to put in perspective the challenges we face today. The gift of Jesus Christ to all of us is priceless.

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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 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.”

– From the Bible, Luke 2:1-14; New International Version (NIV). Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission.

The Faith of a Child

Herman and I finally locked our store and dragged ourselves home to South Caldwell Street in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was 11:00 P.M., Christmas Eve of 1949. We were dogged tired. Ours was one of those big old general appliance stores that sold everything from refrigerators and toasters and record players to bicycles and dollhouses and games. We’d sold almost all of our toys; and all of the layaways, except one package, had been picked up. Usually Herman and I kept the store open until everything had been picked up. We knew we wouldn’t have woken up very happy on Christmas morning knowing that some little child’s gift was back on the layaway shelf. But the person who had put a dollar down on that package never appeared.

Early Christmas morning our twelve-year-old son, Tom, and Herman and I were out under the tree opening up gifts. But I’ll tell you, there was something very humdrum about this Christmas. Tom was growing up; he hadn’t wanted any toys – just clothes and games. I missed his childish exuberance of past years. As soon as breakfast was over Tom left to visit his friend next door....Herman disappeared into the bedroom, mumbling, “I’m going back to sleep. There’s nothing left to stay up for anyway.”

So there I was alone, doing the dishes and feeling very let down. It was nearly 9:00 A.M., and sleet mixed with snow cut the air outside. The wind rattled our windows, and I felt grateful for the warmth of the apartment. *Sure glad I don’t have to go out on a day like today*, I thought to myself, picking up the wrappings and ribbons strewn around the living room....And then it began. Something I’d never experienced before. A strange, persistent urge. “Go to the store,” it seemed to say.

I looked at the icy sidewalk outside. *That’s crazy*, I said to myself. I tried dismissing the thought, but it wouldn’t leave me alone. *Go to the store*. Well, I *wasn’t* going to go. I’d never gone to the store on Christmas Day in all of the ten years we’d owned it. No one opened shop on that day. There wasn’t any reason to go, I didn’t want to, and I wasn’t going to.

For an hour I fought that strange felling. Finally, I couldn’t stand it any longer, and I got dressed. “Herman,” I said, feeling silly, “I think I’ll walk down to the store.” Herman woke up with a start. “Whatever for? What are you going to do there?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” I replied lamely. “There’s not much to do here. I just think I’ll wander down.”

He argued against it a little, but I told him that I’d be back soon. “Well, go on,” he grumped, “but I don’t see any reason for it.” I put on my gray wool coat and a gray tam on my head, then my galoshes and my red scarf and gloves. Once outside, none of these garments seemed to help. The wind cut right through me and the sleet stung my cheeks. I groped my way along the mile down to 117 East Park Avenue, slipping and sliding all the way. I shivered, and tucked my hands into my coat to keep them from freezing. I felt ridiculous. I had no business being out in that bitter chill.

There was the store just ahead. The sign announced Radio-Electronic Sales and Service, and the big glass windows jutted out onto the sidewalk. *But, what in the world?* I wondered. In front of the store stood two little boys, huddled together, one about nine, and the other six. “Here she comes!” yelled the older one. He had his arm around the younger. “See, I told you she would come,” he said jubilantly. They were little black children, and they were half-frozen. The younger one’s face was wet with tears, but when he saw me, his eyes opened wide and his sobbing stopped.

“What are you two children doing out here in this freezing rain?” I scolded, hurrying them into the store and turning up the heat. “You should be at home on a day like this!” They were poorly dressed. They had no hats or gloves, and their shoes barely held together. I rubbed their small, icy hands, and got them up close to the heater.

“We’ve been waiting for you,” replied the older. They had been standing outside since 9:00 A.M., the time I normally open the store. “Why were you waiting for me?” I asked, astonished.

“My little brother, Jimmy, didn’t get any Christmas.” He touched Jimmy’s shoulder. “We want to buy some skates. That’s what he wants. We have three dollars. See, Miss Lady,” he said, pulling the money from his pocket.

I looked at the dollars in his hand. I looked at their expectant faces. And then I looked around the store. “I’m sorry,” I said, “but we’ve sold almost everything. We have no ska---” Then my eye caught sight of the layaway shelf with its one lone package. I tried to remember...could it be...? “Wait a minute,” I told the boys. I walked over, picked up the package, unwrapped it and, miracle of miracles, there was a pair of skates!

Jimmy reached for them. *Lord*, I said silently, *let them be his size*. And miracle added upon miracle, they *were* his size.

When the older boy finished tying the laces on Jimmy’s right foot and saw that the skate fit – perfectly – he stood up and presented the dollars to me. “No, I’m not going to take your money,” I told him. I *couldn’t* take his money. “I want you to have these skates, and I want you to use your money to get some gloves for your hands.” The boys just blinked. Then their eyes were like saucers, and their grins stretched wide when they understood I was giving them the skates and I didn’t want their \$3.00.

What I saw in Jimmy’s eyes was like a blessing. It was pure joy, and it was beautiful. My low spirits rose.

After the children had warmed up, I turned down the heater, and we walked out together. As I locked the door, I turned to the older brother and said, “How lucky that I happened to come along when I did. If you’d stood there much longer, you’d have frozen. But how did you boys know I would come?”

I wasn’t prepared for his reply. His gaze was steady, and he answered me softly. “I knew you would come,” he said. “I asked Jesus to send you.” The tingles in my spine weren’t from the cold, I knew. *God had planned this*.

As we waved good-bye, I returned home to a brighter Christmas than I had left. Tom brought his friend over to our house. Herman got out of bed; his father, “Papa” English and sister, Ella, came by. We had a wonderful dinner and a wonderful time.

But the one thing that made that Christmas really wonderful was the one thing that makes every Christmas wonderful – Jesus was there.

– Elizabeth English, *The New Guideposts Christmas Treasury*,

pp. 57-59; Guideposts, Carmel, NY

Christmas Traditions

Christmas carols. 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.

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.

Twelfth Night

There was 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 a family custom of what they would do with the Christmas Tree. 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. Finally, consider the burning of the tree itself. If you can burn your tree without violating fire ordinances, 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.

For the New Year I would add, “Make sure you list your blessings: name them one by one”!

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.