

"I am setting a
plumb line in the
midst of my people..."

Amos 7:8



WITNESS

Oregon-Idaho Chapter, Methodist Federation for Social Action

November 18, 2016

Greetings!

Fall is finally setting in and the election is over. I will admit to feeling sick and terrified at the outcome. There have been so many responses to this election, good and bad. In a statement from Susan Henry-Crow we are reminded that "we are called to not only hear the fears and see the wounds, but to take action against fear and hate. Acts of hatred and violence that are being perpetrated are unacceptable and must be rejected in any and every form." With that, the *action* we take is even more important.

In this edition of *Witness* you will find an invitation to two events. One will be an MFSA gathering December 14, the other is February 17-20 for the WMJM Conference. Also note reports and responses to crisis in our communities and our world.

Wishing you the spirit and love of Christmas as we share Thanksgiving with family and friends and enter into Advent.



Peace and blessings,
Louise Kienzle, OR-ID MFSA Newsletter Editor

YOU ARE INVITED

to any of our regular MFSA Board meetings! We meet every other month, presently on the 4th Wednesday, alternating between the Conference Center in Portland and Capitol Manor in Salem. Our meetings typically are from 10:30am-2:30pm and you may attend for any or all of the meeting. Lunch is an 'on your own' sack lunch. We begin our meetings with a program of up to an hour on topics relating to social justice. If YOU or your group has an idea for a program you would like to share please let us know!

Please join members and friends of MFSA on December 14 at the Conference Center from 11:00-2:00 for a 'gathering' of support. This is meant to be a time to share our feelings and begin a discussion of our response to events following the election and to likely changes in public policy in the new administration. Please bring a simple potluck item to share for lunch.

Our next Executive Board meeting will be January 25 in Salem.

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Like us on Facebook

Have you renewed your MFSA membership yet? Did you know that you can now renew online at www.oimfsa.org

Dates to Remember

December 14: MFSA Gathering, Portland

January 25: OR/ID MFSA Executive Board meeting, Salem

February 17-20: Rise Up!, Portland

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
Luke 12.34

What matters to us is what we pay attention to.
When nobody pays attention to people, when they are not heard, they get the message that their life does not matter.

If their lives matter they must first matter to you.
Today you will encounter someone who's gotten the message their life doesn't matter.
You can show otherwise by listening to them.
You can hear their story, hear their heart, listen to what they are saying.

And if it really matters to you, speak up for them that they may be heard, give them the microphone, that they may bear that treasure into the world.

Until they are heard their lives matter only to God.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes

OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTION IN OUR ANNUAL CONFERENCE

UNITING TO ACT FOR A MORE JUST WORLD

Karen Nelson

WMJM Conference
Presidents Day Weekend 2017
February 17-20, 2017
Sheraton Airport Hotel, Portland, OR

Come gather in Portland with WMJM activists for **"Rise Up! Uniting To Act For a More Just World."**

[Beth Zemsky](#) will lead the main part of the weekend, which will focus on building our movement of people who are passionate about justice in a lot of different areas. Beth has the ability to help people think intersectionally and will help move us to a new competence in intersectionality to strengthen our movement.



HOMELESSNESS: RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSES

Karen Nelson

October 15 was a rainy, windy day in Oregon, a day when people sought shelter from the storm. About twenty people gathered at Tigard UMC to learn more about homelessness and how we, as people of faith, can respond to this crisis in our world.

After Columbia District Superintendent Erin Martin centered the gathering in worship, our first presenter, Paul Schroeder from [New City Initiative](#), led us in a compassionate seeing exercise. When we meet a homeless person, we cannot judge that person's life story based on our own life story. Those stories do not match. We must build relationships and learn to see compassionately, to engage our curiosity, to ask, "I wonder..."

The theme of being in relationship continued into the presentation of Rob Justus, who founded [Home First](#). Rob spoke of relationships of mutuality and not power. And we always need to be looking at what homeless people need and not what we need or want to provide.

Our lunch was prepared and delivered by [New City Kitchen](#), giving us an opportunity to hear from a person who had been homeless and now works as a chef at New City Kitchen, a story that brought tears to many.

Our afternoon presenters talked about several different programs that work with those without housing in their communities. Those attending learned some key facts about engaging with the homelessness crisis:

- There is no one model that is right for every place.
- Supporters must first find out what is happening in their community.
- Find out what the needs are by talking with the homeless and asking questions and getting to know them as people.

And if you need ideas or resources, contact an MFSA leadership team member, and we will put you in touch with the presenters. Consider the ways you and your church can provide hope and compassion.

RESOURCES AND RESPONSES

HOW DO WE BEGIN TO HEAL?

Barbara Nixon

I submitted this piece for publication to the MFSA newsletter on Tuesday, November 8, before the election results began to be tallied. I did this intentionally because my thoughts are the same no matter who is elected as our next president. I am sure, as you read this newsletter, we are already showing new and different signs of the serious disagreements, frustrations and anger that have underpinned this entire election process.

I have asked myself if there is anything in my life as a follower of Jesus that could be of help in work we must do together to address and begin to heal the great divide we are experiencing. Two things come to mind.

One comes from the work of Parker Palmer, Quaker author and activist, who speaks of "standing in the tragic gap," which he describes as that place between how things are and what is wonderfully possible; between despairing cynicism and uncompromising idealism. This in-between space is the only space in which transformation of difficult situations can occur. Palmer speaks of preparing to listen carefully to one another's point of view AND he stresses the need to prepare for this listening in some trustworthy community, where you can examine life and motives without self-deception. (*)

This is difficult work because, let's face it—most of us simply think we are right. And in recent months, we have dug ourselves into trenches to defend our points of view. To stand in the gap is to rise from those trenches without defenses in order to listen and consider possible ways forward; being vulnerable in language, thought and action. Our rhetoric and actions need to be reflections of an openness to the possibility that we have something to learn.

This does not mean we abandon our point of views. It does mean we don't defend them so that there is room for nuanced shifts that can become bridges across these daunting gaps between us. Within my congregation in Corvallis, we believe approaching such gaps defenselessly is perhaps the only path to significantly changing the

world for the better. It is my sincere hope and prayer that we can all learn to listen, speak and act from such openness in coming days.

A second thought I have about a way forward very much connects to this idea of the "tragic gap." It is a perspective borrowed from ancient Celtic Christianity. The Celtic tradition speaks of "thin places" where earth and heaven touch; where the holy and the ordinary intertwine; where joy and grief connect. Another way to say this might be to say that a "thin place" is where one actually meets God—or the source of love. Jesus lived/lives in this "thin place" all the time. We, whose day to day lives are filled with distractions, need to seek out such times and spaces in order to glimpse and grasp this amazing, loving union. In my mind, to step out into a "tragic gap" is to step into a "thin place" where one finds love and can begin to trust that love honestly has something (if not everything) to do with what goodness is possible.

"Tragic gaps" and "thin places" are phrases that speak to me. If these particular spiritual words do not speak to you, I would simply say things this way: In order to move forward as a nation, we must behave much differently than we have behaved collectively for months. And that takes courage and wisdom and kindness.

Loving God, may you pour these upon us in abundance. Until your Kingdom comes in fullness. Amen.

(**) You can read more about the concept of the tragic gap in Palmer's book [A Hidden Wholeness](#).*

MORAL HAZARD AND INHUMANITY

Seth Godin

One bit of economic reasoning says, "If there are no consequences, people will make bad choices." Don't let big banks get bailouts, because if we do, bankers will take bigger risks. So, make sure that the dentist is expensive (and painful) because that will encourage people to brush their teeth.

And don't make it too easy to collect on fire insurance, or people will be careless with matches. Insurers call these behaviors 'moral hazards.' In specific instances, people will make choices that cause harm to themselves and to society because they don't fear the consequences.

Without a doubt, this makes sense for organizations. But the instances are more specific than you might guess. For example, awareness of the certainty of lung cancer forty years later doesn't do much to keep teens from smoking. The long-term consequences didn't matter—it was a tax on cigarettes that made the biggest difference.

And telling a mentally ill homeless person that he 'deserves' to live on the street because of bad choices along the way isn't doing anything for him, or to those that might be forced into his situation down the road. Waiting for an employee to screw up so we can fire her seems a convoluted way to set a standard for the rest of the team.

Too often, we get confused about *what people deserve vs. what they get*. We use our instinctual, Calvinist understanding of moral hazard as an excuse to teach people a lesson, to callously embrace an efficient market. But of course, the market isn't efficient at all. It unevenly distributes rewards to people based on luck, and allows those with an early head start to amplify that lead with less and less effort.

It turns out that building homes for homeless people is a great way to cut homelessness overall. Poverty doesn't usually respond to moral hazard approaches.

Life's risky and it's played for keeps. We all benefit from a safety net.

*From "Seth Godin's Blog on marketing, tribes and respect."
[Click here to view mailing archives](#), or [here to subscribe](#)*

RURAL OREGON DESERVES BETTER



Rural Organizing Project

Advancing Democracy in Rural Oregon since 1991

Many of us across Oregon are reeling after the acquittal of the Bundys' and some of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupiers. How can seven people who orchestrated a 41-day armed standoff that held an entire community hostage be acquitted, especially on the same day over 100 indigenous water protectors in North Dakota were shot at, beaten, and arrested?

Some media are repeating the false Bundy talking point that this acquittal is "a victory for rural communities". Which rural communities? Talk to the residents of Harney County, and residents of neighboring Eastern Oregon counties where militia activity is widespread, and they will tell you that the acquittal puts a target on their backs if they speak up for the simple right to air political opinions that dissent from the militias. The Burns Paiute Tribe are pointing out the hypocrisy and insult of so-called patriots claiming tribal land as their own, threatening tribal leadership, desecrating the land, damaging and stealing tribal artifacts during the occupation, and getting away with it scot-free.

We are seeing militia members celebrate and claim the acquittal as a victory; an affirmation of their tactics, which include claiming to represent entire communities they don't actually reside in, while using intimidation, threats of violence, and vandalism to silence critique and political opposition. This verdict has sent a message that these tactics are not only effective, but also go without consequence.

Whatever the reason for the verdict, it has greatly increased the anxiety felt by rural Oregonians. Many worry their community could be next. Rural Oregonians, and especially the residents of Harney County, have already experienced months of harassment and intimidation by Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and other paramilitaries just for disagreeing. Militia supporters have threatened violence toward critics (including the Rural Organizing Project), indigenous leaders, law enforcement, and even the Governor of Oregon. This decision leaves many people in fear.

It is impossible to ignore the racism of the militia land seizure in Harney County, the acquittal, and even the Federal charges themselves. At no time in this process was justice sought for the seizure and desecration of the Burns Paiute Tribe's unceded lands, arguably the most egregious crime committed by these so-called patriots. We also see this structural racism mirrored in the news from North Dakota, where unarmed indigenous people, defending their Treaty lands from being bulldozed for an oil pipeline, are faced with militarized state police committing violence on the behalf of corporations. Meanwhile, in Oregon, armed white militia members face no consequences for holding a community hostage for over a month, running rampant over sacred ground. Many of the officers involved in the military intervention in Standing Rock hail from rural areas just like ours where emergency services are already stretched past their limit, yet they are being committed to act as publicly funded rent-a-cops for an oil conglomerate. **The assumption that our rural communities support these actions is simply wrong.**

This acquittal reminds many rural Oregonians once again that we must fight to overcome our isolation. Our rural communities across the state are struggling to stay connected, to repair damaged social ties and institutions ravaged by years of recession. Armed militia groups offer only more divisions, fostering a culture of fear that raises temperatures in our communities. In fact, Patriot groups in Oregon and corporations trying to advance the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota thrive on our division, pitting us against each other and making us believe that we are marginal. Militias and so-called Patriot groups have grown in power in rural communities in Oregon largely because of the vacuum left by decades of divestment and neglect that have created massive crises in social services and safety nets, from 911 dispatch to schools. Rural Oregonians are feeling more vulnerable than ever before.

Let's come together as human dignity leaders, activists, concerned community members, and neighbors to tell the real story of rural Oregon. We all know that people do not support or join insurrectionist movements if their needs are met. We need to build security for rural communities if we want this crisis to end. This means holding our political leadership accountable to rural Oregonians, coming together with our neighbors to envision how we want our communities to look, and doing the hard work of organizing to see that vision through to becoming a reality.

As rural Oregonians, we call upon our elected officials and urban friends to show up for rural communities as we struggle for basic decency and opportunity. No Oregonian should have to fear that a loved one will be followed home by a militia member or worry that their 911 call will go unanswered. Living in our state must come with a shared commitment to fund a baseline level of vital services in every Oregon county.

We need 24-hour a day, 7-day a week 911 service, public education, and public libraries. We need access to affordable healthcare and mental health resources. We need new economic engines that do not rely on natural resource extraction. We need meaningful and dignified jobs that pay living wages. We need safety nets that actually catch the most vulnerable in our communities.

Rural Oregonians deserve the opportunity to determine what is acceptable in our communities and to know that violence will not be condoned against the people for any reason, corporate or private.

We invite you to edit, add to, use, and share this statement as your own. Send an open letter to your community from your human dignity group. Use this to craft a letter to the editor. Start a local social media campaign. Let's tell the real story of rural Oregonians and what our priorities are: creating solutions that work for all of us, not just for those who have the most guns.

Jess, Cara, Grace, Mike, and the ROP Team

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

I feel like I woke up to a different world on November 9. It seems that something in the United States has fundamentally changed and not in a good way. Each new day there are signs of hope and signs of great danger. We have many fears, not without reason. What do we do now?

Our faith gives us a perspective that others may not have. We know that governments and politicians never have and never will bring about the kingdom of God. That is our task and always has been; that fact is just extra clear right now. But we have the strength of God and God's people. We know that God stands on the side of justice for the poor and the marginalized, and we know that love always eventually defeats hate.



We must not give in to either despair or blind anger. "Get over it", if that means "what will be will be", is not an appropriate response for followers of Jesus. Just being angry for the next four years is not helpful or healthy, either. We must begin to turn fear and despair into actions of love and justice. None of us can change the election, and none of us can fix all that is wrong and will be wrong, but each of us can do something. We must not let injustice become accepted as "the new normal".

Much as I dislike the language of war, it is clear that there are battles ahead. In all those, we must continue to cling to love as our strongest weapon. Violence, including verbal violence of insult, disrespect and uninvestigated assumptions about others, will not lead to victory.

None of us is in this alone. Now, more than ever, we need community. People in marginalized groups need to see the intersections of injustice and work together. We must come together. Some of us have the luxury of living and worshipping where we have a lot of support, but if you are not one of those people, ask for help. Contact me or anyone else on the executive committee list, and we will do our best to help you.

Some members of our chapter will gather at the UM Conference Center in Portland on December 14 from 11:00 to 2:00 for a time of sharing, prayer, and strategizing. Please join us if you feel the need for this kind of gathering. If you can't make it to Portland, find a group of friends and have a gathering in your own community. Let me know if you need help with that, and I'll do what I can to make connections.

As Moses said in his final words to his people: "Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; [God] will not fail you or forsake you." (Deuteronomy 31:6 NRSV)

In solidarity and hope,

Jan



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If you are a Facebook user, be sure to like our page, "MFSA Oregon-Idaho". Also be sure to like the national page, "Methodist Federation for Social Action". Invite your friends to like us, too.

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OREGON IDAHO MFSA ONLINE



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We have transitioned to an electronic newsletter. If you have email access, please make sure we have your current email address. If you do not have email access and wish to continue receiving a paper copy please let us know. Contact Jan Nelson at jannelson515@msn.com or Methodist Federation for Social Action, Oregon-Idaho Chapter, P.O. Box 134, Salem OR 97308.