

“Top Ten Stories of Hope from 2017: The Hallelujah Anyhow Edition”

“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.

Keep our hearts tender.

Keep our eyes soft.

Because this is what we are about:

We know there is no answer but to love one another.

We bear witness against unnecessary destruction.

We gather in community to practice being the person

The world is calling us to be.

We cannot do everything,

But we can do something, and that something is not nothing.

So forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything

That is how the light gets in.”

For as long I have been your minister you have, every first or second Sunday in January, humored me as I share some of the top ten religious news stories Of the previous year,

A practice I stole unabashedly from my mentor, Roger Paine,

Who did the same during his long ministry in Lincoln.

But look – do you ever notice how all these news roundups of the year –

Mine or somewhere else -

Usually highlight terrible things or the next big worry?

I notice.

Nestor Ramos, a columnist for the Globe, says ‘*thanks to the internet,*

We hear about the world’s many ugly bits more readily and fully

Than we ever have.”

And because of the internet, I think we also miss some of the stories
Of hope and light and love and life.

So!

This year a change, for me and I hope for you to:

Sharing 10 stories of hope from 2017: the Hallelujah Anyhow Edition.

And even if they don't seem outwardly religious, remember what you've
Heard me remind us many times before,

That the word religion comes from the Latin 'religio'

Meaning to bring together that which has been torn apart.

Ready? Ready.

And a big shout-out to the Christian Century Magazine who helped
Me find and shape these stories.

10) Mothers on the Street

Chicago has often been paralyzed in the face of the spike in gun violence in
the past years, and a meaningful response by the city's leaders has seemed,
Despite good intentions, has been beyond their capacity.

But this year some regular folks in the city have stepped up.

One of them is *Mothers Against Senseless Killing*,

Who were inspired by the simple idea that moms standing on street corners,
Keeping an eye on things, are a powerful deterrent.

Well, duh!

The found – Tamar Manaseh, encourages moms to set out some lawn chairs

And just sit with their friends, perhaps grill some dogs,

And organize some games in vacant lots.

Tamar know that more than their presence is needed,

Like investment in education and job creation.

But she's convinced the women's presence on the streets –

Often wearing pink t-shirts that proclaim in bold

“Moms on Patrol” has a had a ripple effect extending block upon block.

And no expertise is needed.

She says, *I just sit on a corner and hang out with my friends.*

Anybody can do it.”

Maybe next fathers will be their to with their own t-shirt: “Dads on Duty”

Moral of the story: cops can't hold a candle to moms on a mission.

9) From Refugee to Mayor

Who's ever been to Missoula, Montana?

Nope, me neither.

But a group called Soft Landing Missoula has mission to welcome

Refugees to the community,

Who come to Missoula from all over the world.

Who knew?

But when they arrive they often face considerable hostility from

Outside the city,

And when our Big Button President

Announced that the number of refugees coming to the United States

Would drop by more than 50,000,

It seemed the like the rhetoric of xenophobia was winning –

In Montana and everywhere else.

However, last month one refugee Wilmot Collins was elected mayor

Of Helena.

Wilmot came to the United States in 1994 from Liberia.
He campaigned for mayor by going door-to-door,
Connecting with voters on the need for low-income housing
And funding for first responders.
His message resonated, and Wilmot beat the four-term (!) incumbent
To become the first black mayor of Helena since 1873 (which is surprise
On its own!).

8) Being Curious and Kind

Celeste Ng's 6-year-old son has a soft and big heart –
It's huge!, according to Mom.
In fact, the little guy is so sensitive that he skips over the pages of children's
Books where someone gets hurt – which means that all of Grimm's
Fairytale are avoided,
And the Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* is kept closed (because have you
actually re-read that book recently? It's like a #metoo incident all on its
own).
Anyway, Ng's son often retreats when faced with trouble.
She knows she can't give him a thick and leathery coat for protection,
And she's also aware that fear has a way of convincing us that hardness
Is somehow good.
Fear prompts people to hide their vulnerabilities inside shells and behind
walls.

So, Ng, tell her boy of the good things that the shells and walls keep out,
Reminding him of their families' motto: "be curious, be kind, be helpful."
The boy can't figure out why 'curious' is in the mix.

And Ng tells him: *because being curious is admitting that you don't know, But also that you want to know...*

That people you don't know are worth knowing, and that they have something to teach you.

That learning about them, and encountering new ideas, doesn't threaten You.....it enriches you,

That you approach the world as a trove of things to take in, rather things You frantically, fearfully wall out."

By show of hands: who wants Christine Ng as your personal life coach, Parenting you through your day?

7) Jobs for Returning Citizens (or Universalism in practice)

I love this one.

A new restaurant opened this year is a suburb outside Chicago

That exclusively employs former prisoners and teaches its workers

All sides of the restaurant business – accounting, dealing with vendors,

Managing a store, handling hard-to-please customers.

The project calls on professionals in the community to help with

All the training.

The results have been impressive.

The recidivism rate of these ex-offenders is close to zero (compared to the national rate, which has nearly half of those released from prison back

In jail after 3 years, the chief reason being that can't get a job).

The restaurant doesn't hide what it's doing.

It educates people in the community about the challenges

Returning citizens face (because a criminal record is the biggest reason
Employers give for not interviewing you),
And it has educated employers about the kinds of support ex-offenders need.
Above all, it has shown that returning citizens (which is a great phrase, isn't
it?) are, when give the chance, extraordinarily motivated.
But maybe the best part of this story is the restaurant's name.
Ready? *Felony Franks*.

6) Genius for Others

While our president tweeted at us yesterday touting just how much
A 'very stable genius' he is,
I read this story.
It starts with the fact that its not easy to test for lead contamination
In a home water system.
You can pick up the test kit at the local hardware,
But you still have send off the sample to a certified lab capable
Of running the right tests.

But all that may change thanks to an inventive 11-year-old
Gintanjali Rao (*Ro*)
Who became appalled by the water contamination crisis in Flint, MI.
Worried that this tragedy could occur elsewhere,
Gintanjali went to work.
She set up a lab in her Colorado home and experimented for months.
She singular goal to devise a portable detection device
That could identify lead compounds in water.

Using carbon nanotubes to detect changes in the flow of electrons,
A signal processor with a Bluetooth attachment,
And a smartphone app to display the test results,
Rao came up with device that overwhelmed the judges at the
Discovery Education 3M Young Scientist Challenge,
Who named her “America’s Top Young Scientist.”

Not many seventh graders are brainy enough to know even know
What a chemically treated carbon nanotube is (do you?),
But how beautiful that one someone who does would have the wild dream
Of saving lives with a device of her own design.

Ok, time for a ‘Hallelujah Anyhow’ Intermission

Best travel tale: a Republican and a Democrat took a 1600mile
Road trip together, and got along (You can watch in on YouTube)

Best commute: a high school senior got stuck on a NYC train
And missed his graduation, so passengers made one for him (you can watch
it on YouTube).

Best discovery: Amateur stargazers discovered a new type of aurora....
And called it “Steve”

5) Diversity Welcomed

Skokie, Ill, where Nazi’s had planned a march more than 40 years ago
Because of the large number of Jews who lived there,
Is plastered this year with signs that read “Skokie Welcomes Everyone”
A nonprofit called “SkokieCares” created the signs after some residents

Where yelled at for wearing hijabs and told to go back to their own countries.

The signs are being given out at a number of common locations, including the village hall and the library.

The flank the downtown street, and they're part of the landscaping in people's front yards.

But SkokieCares doesn't just give out lawn signs – it also helps people find volunteer opportunities and meets to talk about privilege, power and oppression.

But says one resident, *the signs function for me as visible evidence of hope in a community that – despite its remarkable diversity – contains much of the anger that drives our politics these days.*

The theologian Paul Tillich defined a symbol as “something that participates in that to which it points.”

So in this sense, the “Skokie Welcomes Everyone”,

Like “Hate Has No Home Here” are a symbol of how we can live well with one another across differences, and in saying we welcome everyone, and that hate has no home, we begin to live out that welcome.

Hate Has No Home Here magnets are waiting for you outside in the parlor if you don't have one yet.

4) LGBTQ Church Camp

On an island in Bay Lake, north of Minneapolis,

High school students from across the country gather for a week of summer camp.

Sponsored by the non-profit Naming Project,

The camp is for LGBTQ teens and allies who are looking to have honest Conversations about faith and issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Founded by a Lutheran minister,

The camp helps teenagers deepen their sense of identity as people of faith While living fully into bodies that may not fit into the boxes prescribed by The culture.

The Naming Project provides these teens with, quote, “a safe and sacred space where these youth are named and claimed by a loving God, And advocate for systematic change in church and society.

The campers roast marshmallows, share stories of faith, stage a cabaret Talent show, worship, swim in the lake, and study the Bible.

They do all this, the camp’s mission states, as God’s beautiful and beloved Children, affirmed in the knowledge they reflect God’s image.

And beyond the obvious, why is this a big deal? Because at least five Lutheran denominations view the identity of these teens as sinful and ‘contrary to Scripture.’

3) Bridging the Divide:

After the 2016 election, Amy Fykhholm was hit hard when she realized That the secretary of her son’s school for Donald Trump because she Honestly believed Hillary Clinton wanted to take away her guns.

What she thought was a bizarre and exaggerated political claim was, For this secretary, a true statement.

But Amy and this woman never talked about it,

And it was hard to envision an environment in which they might.

Since then, Amy has been inspired to learn about the number

And variety of people and organizations who have been trying to foster
That kind of conversation.

“Hi From the Other Side,” created by two graduate students here in Boston,
Arranges phone calls between people from opposite sides of the political
spectrum.

And, “The People’s Supper” has organized more than 500 ‘bridging’
And ‘healing’ suppers.

And, “Living Room Conversations” has been connecting people through
Skype and in person,

And, “The Listen First” project has held private retreats on democracy
And power, trying to reshape political discourse.,

And, “Shop Talk Live” uses barber shops to foster in-person conversations.

Many of these organizations are using the principles developed by Quaker
Parker Palmer and the Center for Courage and Renewal on how to hold a
Constructive conversation.

Amy reports that this month there will be a People’s Supper under way
In her own community. She has invited the school secretary to join her.

I’m going to sign up for Hi from the Other Side this week.

Will you make a commitment with me to learn about of these projects

And join me?

2) Assault has Consequences

If 2016 taught us that sexual assault allegations aren’t a deal breaker

For American voters, 2017 affirmed the consequences for such

Behavior are nonetheless growing more serious in other spheres.

One after another after another after another,

Prominent men have been publicly accused of assault and harassment
As more survivors bravely step forward.
Several of these men have seen their career opportunities evaporate.

One writer says that he was particularly struck by the reactions
Against Kevin Spacey.

Netflix promptly fired the actor from its “House of Cards” series,
Along with cancelling an upcoming film that was in post-production.
Another movie replaced Spacey in a supporting role – a month before its
Release, and long after his scenes were shot.
It’s hard to imagine such an unequivocal, expensive response from
The entertainment industry even last year.

Yes, these decisions were financially motivated, but so were previous
Decisions to look the other way, to trust that the public loved a star
Enough to ignore his sins, or to punish those he sinned against for bringing
It up in the first place.
Much work remains, but that public, and the financial calculations,
Seems to be shifting – not everywhere, not soon enough,
Yet in real, hope-filled ways.

**1) And last but not least, this story from NPR’s Story Corps series
That was shared on July 31st.**

<https://www.npr.org/series/4516989/storycorps/archive?date=7-31-2017>

Friends, in 2018 may we discover who we be ‘the line’ for,

And may be the stories of hope we most want to see in the world

That is desperate for them.

Happy, holy, hopeful New Year.....

Amen.