

Bright, Shiny Objects

by **Sandy Sorensen**
Director of the Washington, D.C., Office

Although I have been traveling out of the country the last two weeks, it didn't take me long upon return to find myself right back in the thick of the 2016 presidential campaign saga.

Presidential campaigns, especially in the early going, are filled with the lure of "bright, shiny objects" – the memorable sound bites, the catchy slogans, the quick fixes to complex realities, and the salve of superficial assurances for our anxieties – the things that attract and fascinate us, but in the long run do not offer solid ground for the future.

The bright, shiny objects of the campaign trail don't generally translate easily into sound, viable public policy. Campaigns have a way of concentrating our focus on identifying the ideal – or perhaps at best, the most acceptable candidate. They can provide easy cover for us, the electorate – allowing us to relinquish our civic role in shaping responsible, responsive public policy decision-making – either by justifying our disillusioned withdrawal or fueling our quest for the one candidate who holds the perfect answers to all the challenges that face us as a nation and the world.

In recent years, we have seen the season of political campaigning expand at the expense of meaningful, impactful governance. Good governance and a strong common life require more than just capable, competent candidates – they require the consistent, thoughtful, informed civic engagement of "we the people." And not just at the polls or at campaign events, but long after Election Day is over.

Sound public policy dialogue and decision-making also requires the strength, wisdom and insight of principled compromise, collaboration and a willingness to persist in the search for the highest common ground for moving forward together. For it to work we must cross divides of every sort and recognize our inevitable interconnectedness.

I find myself returning often to words spoken by Winona LaDuke at the United Church of Christ General Synod gathering in Cleveland, OH, earlier

this summer. Winona LaDuke is an internationally known writer, speaker and activist, a member of the Ojibway nation from the White Earth reservation in northern Minnesota. She is the founder and co-director of Honor the Earth, a national advocacy group encouraging support and funding for native environmental groups.

As she took the stage she greeted us with the words, “Hello my relatives.” In that moment, in the midst of so much debate and difference and challenge, I was struck by the power of those words, struck by the power of that way of thinking about each other and the Earth. What would it mean if, for better or for worse, we acted and lived out of the sense that we are all relatives?

She talked about the implications of our individual and societal addiction to fossil fuels, and specifically about how her White Earth reservation community had faced this challenge. She said that for a long time they had waited “for someone to fix stuff for us...” And we can do that, she said. “We can wait around for someone to fix it, or we can look around and say, we might not be the smartest, best looking or most well-connected people, but we are the ones who are here.”

If we are honest with ourselves, how much time do we really spend waiting for “someone to come fix it,” whatever the **it** is? How often do we wait for the right whatever it is – the right speech, the right candidate, the right slogan, the right strategic plan, the right structural/institutional change, the right time, the right spiritual practice, the right decision?

There is a remarkable power in surrendering our need for **the** right answer, a spiritual humility that births possibility that can only be ours if we look around, see what is, join in community and make the way as we go. With so much at stake in these times, we the people need to be “all in,” all the way, together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sandy Sorensen is Director of the Washington, D.C., Office of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries.

LEARN

ucc.org/justice

DONATE

bit.ly/jwmnin

ARCHIVE

WJ
f

bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.