



January 2018 // Week Two

This week in Ministry Briefing uncovers some of the ways that different groups are addressing the societal challenges of poverty, homelessness, and sexual abuse.

Our Church Trends section is quite full this week, as we have several insightful opinion pieces about rural church trends and how the Fellowship of Christian Athletes legacy is showing up in the NFL.

A reminder for digital readers: In the Table of Contents you can click on the page number to jump to a specific article summary.

Thanks for reading!

Ed

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(The updated website remains under construction)

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News and Analysis

Why Some Technology Experts Fear Artificial Intelligence

Technology experts such as Elon Musk fear Artificial Intelligence (AI) because of its unintended consequences that could prove destructive for the earth. As technology systems seek greater efficiency, they can become increasingly destructive in pursuit of an otherwise harmless goal. Musk sees this as a new version of the no-holds-barred capitalism that is already causing problems in Silicon Valley.

[BuzzFeed](#)

Why Do the Poor Need Social Services?

As a series of cuts and new work requirements could potentially be added to medicaid and other social service programs, there is a debate about why some Americans seek these programs. For instance, only 1.6% to 2.3% of America's poor are seeking a job, and this is because 87% of able-bodied adults covered under Medicaid already have jobs but their salaries are not sufficient to cover living costs. In addition, 75% of those not working are full-time caregivers for a relative.

[Washington Post](#)

Homeless Shelters at Capacity During Cold Snap

During the recent cold snap that impacted much of American and sent temperatures into the negative digits over night, many shelters reported being full and even turning some away. There are about 550,000 homeless people in America and only 275,000 emergency beds. During a Code Blue where the homeless must be given shelter, there remains a shortage of places available for them.

[NPR](#)

Privacy Concerns Mount Over Smartphones

Smartphones are packed with sensors and collect data about a user's location and activities for the purpose of providing different apps and services. However, the nature of this information has been under increasing scrutiny. For instance, Google uses the personal credentials of users to track them, while Apple keeps most of their users' data on the phones and makes most of it anonymous. However, certain apps may be gaining access to data that could be shared more widely.

[Gizmodo](#)

Over 200,000 Could Be Sent Back to El Salvador

El Salvador remains one of the most violent and dangerous countries in the world, and after a devastating earthquake prompted Congress to grant Temporary Protected Status to thousands of immigrants, many took advantage of the opportunity to migrate to the U.S.. However, the Trump administration has now revoked the T.P.S. status of immigrants from El Salvador, even though many have since had children in the U.S. who are naturalized citizens.

[New Yorker](#)

Is Trump Dividing Evangelicals from Middle East Christians?

The announcement by Donald Trump to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel put American evangelicals at odds with Arab Christians, such as those who make up 2% of the Palestinian population. Palestinians recognize Jerusalem as the capital of their own state, putting them at odds with American evangelicals who tend to support the government of Israel.

[RNS](#)

Trump Has a Different Vision for America Than Reagan

An analysis of Donald Trump's "America First" rhetoric is a notable departure from the vision of American exceptionalism articulated by Reagan and many politicians of both parties for years. Exceptionalism views America as a chosen vehicle used by God to spread democracy and religious freedom throughout the world. America First views America as a

competitor in a zero-sum fight for limited resources.

[Religion and Politics](#)

Moody Bible Institute Leadership Shaken Up

The Moody Bible Institute has announced the resignation of President J. Paul Nyquist and Chief Operating Officer Steve Mogck, while Provost Junias Venugopal has retired. The shake up follows tension between administration and staff over transparency, laying off 10% of staff, financial troubles, and enrollment declines.

[Christianity Today](#)

California MegaChurches Changed How We View Christianity

The churches of California (with 200 having over 2,000 attendees) have served as an epicenter for changing the face of Christianity in America, ushering in new movements and trends for churches. From Pentecostal movements to casual Sunday attire, to the contemporary music of Calvary Chapel, to the big church programs of Saddleback Church, California is driving both changes in Christianity and how Christianity is perceived in America.

[The Conversation](#)

American Child Death Rates Are Alarming

Numerous studies have found that rising poverty rates, struggling school systems, spotty access to healthcare, and easily available guns make America the most dangerous country for young people out of the 19 most prosperous countries in the world. In addition, American babies were 76% more likely to die before turning one and American children were 57% more likely to die before adulthood.

[Washington Post](#)

Statistics and Trends

Does Boston Have a Race Problem?

Boston has a reputation as a racist city among some, but is it earned? A study by the Boston Globe found that Boston has a significantly smaller population of black residents in its metro area, and even that population is made up of a large number of Caribbean and African immigrants. During the historic migration of blacks out of the south into northern states between 1910-1970, some housing policies in northern cities attempted to keep blacks from purchasing homes or settling in white neighborhoods. However, the history of Boston remains speculative at this point.

[New Geography](#)

The Suburbs Are Where Centrist Politics Live

While urban cores vote for Democrats and rural areas vote for Republicans, the suburbs remain politically divided and are ripe for centrist candidates. Suburban residents make up more than half of Americans and they are more or less divided between the two parties, tending to prefer status quo. Some observers believe that centrist candidates like John Kasich of Ohio can win over these more centrist voters.

[OC Register](#)

Why Sleep Is Essential

A Danish study found that sleep is essential for removing toxins from the brain and that sleep deprivation for 200 hours could result in these toxins building up to the point that they could kill a person. Seven hours of sleep is essential for flushing these toxins from the brain. Over the short term sleep deprivation impacts concentration, but over the long term, regular sleep deprivation may be linked to chronic fatigue, confusion, poor decision-making, irritability, headaches, weight gain, depression and heart disease.

[USA Today](#)

Negative Perception Leads to Shortage of Truckers

Although 70% of the goods in the American economy are moved by trucks, there has been a steady decline of truckers due to a negative perception of truckers, long hours, an aging workforce, and stagnant wages. While some companies have given pay raises to truckers, there is just one truck available for every 12 loads that need to be shipped.

[NPR](#)

Poverty Impacts Psychology and Choices

A psychologist at the University of North Carolina found in a series of studies that those who perceive themselves as poor tend to view themselves in a far more negative light, struggling to speak up and tending to take more financial risks in order to change their situation. However, a study in California found that the wealthy are indifferent to any financial gains they make.

[New Yorker](#)

"Lady Bird" Shows Positive Experience in Catholic School

Director Greta Gerwig pulled from her own experiences in Catholic high school in creating her movie Lady Bird. While Gerwig was a Unitarian, she felt accepted and included at her school, and many of the priests and nuns were wise and compassionate. She highlights this aspect of Catholic schools, especially since negative movies about Catholics have been done.

[RNS](#)

A Quarter of Young Americans Experience Discrimination

A new PRRI study found that 25% of young Americans, ages 15-24, have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment based on their race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity, immigration status, or religious beliefs. Asians (35%) and blacks (30%) were the most likely to experience mistreatment, compared to white people (4%). In addition, 32% of those who identify as LGBT have been mistreated or targeted, while 54% of women report gender bias incidents.

[PRRI](#)

Work Gets in the Way for Parents, Especially Fathers

A Pew Research survey found that over half of mothers and fathers blame work for preventing them from spending enough time with their children. In fact, 63% of fathers reported that they spend too little time with their children, while only 36% reported spending enough time. Among fathers with a Bachelor's degree, 69% reported spending too little time with their children.

[Pew Research](#)

Should Companies Regulate Smartphones Better?

Steve Jobs famously didn't allow his children to use iPads and limited their screen time, yet, teens are averaging 6 hours per day on smartphones and teens who spend more than five hours a day on smartphones are 71% more likely to have a risk factor for suicide. Digital media use has repeatedly been proven to cause unhappiness and greater health risks, but technology companies have not yet taken steps to offer safety features on their devices such as screen time limits.

[The Conversation](#)

We're More Likely to Change at the End of a Decade

Making a big change or transition in life is often a matter of getting the timing right, and that is especially true for making a change at a "nine-ender" age, such as 29, 39, or 49. People are more likely to make a big push at the end of a decade. In addition, mornings remain one of the most important times for focused, dedicated work.

[The Atlantic](#)

Sermon Illustrations

Can Restorative Justice Work for #MeToo Survivors?

Stephanie Cassatly's mother was murdered twenty years ago, but the weight of that murder remained with her until she explored restorative justice and rethought forgiveness. She shares that forgiveness, "no longer wishes ill or seeks revenges on the person who hurt us, and that it basically untethers us from them and enables us to have a different future from the past." Her own journey of forgiveness could be helpful for women seeking to regain their power after confronting abusers and harassers. For the men guilty of abuse or harassment, many experts believe it's critical to come clean with the truth and to spend some time listening.

[NPR](#)

American Indian Basketball Player Hopes to Play in Division I

Mya Fourstar is a high school sophomore attempting to leave the small town of Frazer, MT in order to play Division I basketball. However, Fourstar faces opposition and discouragement in an American Indian community struggling with depression, alcohol, and drugs. Basketball is a popular escape on many reservations, and her aunt has been helping her train and improve her game.

[Washington Post](#)

How Women Responded to Harassment in the Early 1900's

As more women ventured into cities for shopping or work in the early 1900's, men regularly harassed them or made unwanted advances. These men, known as "mashers," became such a problem that some women learned martial arts in order to defend themselves from sexual assault. Many large cities responded by enacting fines on mashers and hiring more female police officers in order to catch mashers in the act.

[Long Reads](#)

Magazine Sales Industry Exploits the Poor

Young people selling magazines door to door is a common sight in many cities as they travel in a group selling overpriced subscriptions while also sharing their stories of troubled pasts and poverty. The sellers must earn a certain level of points in order to gain promotions and to earn enough money, and if they fail to reach their quotas, they may be left in an unfamiliar city without any resources or contacts. The industry treats their sellers as independent contractors who can be abandoned at any time.

[The Atlantic](#)

What Is the Impact of a Military Occupation on Children?

In the West Bank, which is 62% occupied by Israeli Forces, 12-year-old Ahd Tamimi has grown up surrounded by soldiers, checkpoints, and violence. Her home was demolished by Israeli forces and the spring near her home was seized by Israeli settlers. A video of her slapping an Israeli soldier went viral, prompting debate about the long term generational impact of Palestinians growing up under military occupation. One U.N. expert wrote: “Children form a ghetto mentality and lose hope for the future, which fuels a cycle of despair.”

[The Guardian](#)

How Did the Media Fail Harding and Kerrigan?

Olympic figure skaters Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan both emerged from blue collar backgrounds, but commentators and reporters framed the two skaters as opposites. Harding was the unlikely skater emerging from the wrong side of the tracks, while Kerrigan was the idealized champion. The new movie “I, Tonya” attempts to tell the Tonya Harding story with greater accuracy while asking how narratives about women emerge.

[Good Sports](#)

Under Trump, Peaceful Muslim Americans Live in Fear

Moustafa Bayoumi, a professor at Brooklyn College, is a Muslim American who was devastated by the violence of the 9/11 attacks and he shares that the election of Trump has brought many in the Muslim American

community to a similar place of fear and despair. Bayoumi writes that the vast majority of Muslims in America live in peace and that attacks on Muslims have increased since Trump's election. The most important steps toward healing and hope so far have been those reaching out to offer help and support to Muslims who are now fearful to leave their homes.

[The Nation](#)

Are Podcasts Undermining Preachers?

A controversial article in Christianity Today argues that sharing sermons as podcasts only gives young adults another reason to skip church and makes the mistake of turning sermons into another item to consume. This view runs counter to the many churches that are using social media and podcasts as a way to connect with younger generations in the hope of bringing them back to church. The central question being debated in the piece is whether podcasting churches are unintentionally turning themselves into media content companies.

[Christianity Today](#)

Store Operates Secret Homeless Shelter in New York

A convenience store, known in New York as a bodega, owned by Candido Arcangel has provided a secret shelter to the homeless in its basement despite codes that prevent occupancy of the basement. Arcangel, who can be found behind the deli most days. He shared that he keeps the accommodations simple so that the men view it as a safe spot on their way to finding work, but those who pass through are grateful for his warmth, generosity, and love for God.

[NY Times](#)

Church Trends

Did Churches Handle Sexual Assault Properly?

A dispute has arisen over the way that Highpoint Church in Memphis, TN and Woodlands Parkway Baptist Church in Texas handled Andy Savage's sexual assault of a teen in the youth group he had led. The teen had reported the incident to church leaders, but the accounts of Savage and the victim diverge over the steps he took to ask forgiveness. The victim claims the church failed to follow up with her and urged her to remain silent. While Highpoint Church claims they knew of the incident, Savage's characterization of the event was criticized for downplaying its severity.

[NY Times](#)

What Challenges Do Ministry Spouses Face?

A ministry spouse can often get caught up in the line of fire when a spouse is criticized, when there is gossip about a spouse, or even when a spouse fails to respond to critics in a way they expect. Churches need to be educated about the potential isolation a ministry spouse faces and how easy it is to take out frustrations on a spouse.

[LifeWay](#)

The Church of England Invests in Church Planting

The Renewal and Reform program of the Church of England has turned its focus toward church planting, providing grants of £24.4 million to churches. The largest grant of £4.8 million will go to the Diocese of London, which plans to open 100 new churches in Britain's capital. The diocese plans to revitalize churches and to open "Church Growth Learning Communities."

[Anglican News](#)

Ministry Opportunities and Challenges in Alaska

Pastor Rob Scott is blunt about ministry in Alaska: it's one of the most challenging ministry environments due to the weather and transient nature of the population, but it abounds in opportunities. There is a dire need for church planting throughout rural Alaska, and Scott praises the rugged beauty of Alaska as well as the people who prefer "function over form."

[Baptist Press News](#)

Sociologist Struggles to Define Evangelicals

After reviewing a series of surveys from the Barna Group, LifeWay, and Pew Research, sociologist John Hawthorne writes that it is difficult to define evangelicals according to their beliefs alone. Oftentimes voting patterns don't necessarily match what would be expected based on beliefs. The LifeWay poll found that 28% of Americans self-identify as evangelicals, but 15% strongly agree with evangelical beliefs.

[John Hawthorne](#)

Kansas Pastor Preaches on His Horse and at Work

Pastor Don Mayberry had long felt called to plant a cowboy church in Augusta, Kansas, but finances had long held him back. However, Mayberry found a job at a BG Products plant as a chaplain where he works three 10-hour days each week. He then preaches to ranchers and cowboys from his horse on the other days.

[Baptist Press News](#)

NFL Police Violence Protests Follow Lead of FCA Model

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes has long encouraged athletes to use their sports platforms for the sake of addressing issues beyond sports. Since more Christian athletes in the NFL are black, they are bringing their own experiences and realities into their Christian faith and activism. All of the NFL athletes who protested police violence along with Colin Kaepernick are Christians who participated in FCA.

[Religion and Politics](#)

How Common is Meditation in America?

A Pew Research study of meditation in America found that 77% of Jehovah's Witnesses, 66% of Buddhists, and 60% of Mormons report that they meditate weekly or more often. In addition, 49% of evangelical Protestants report that they meditate just as often. However, the definition of "meditation" used for the survey is not clearly defined and may have confused some respondents, as some could have thought it meant simple mindfulness practices, contemplative prayer, or "meditating" on scripture.

[Pew Research](#)

How Can Churches Respond to Harassment?

The harassment and abuse of women has been pervasive and ugly, with 87% of women between the ages of 18 and 25 reporting that they have been harassed or assaulted. Some pastors have taken steps toward inviting men to confess their failures and to repent publicly. While one radio show invited men to read the harassing tweets that some women have received in person to the victims. These disruptive steps offer helpful responses to consider in churches.

[RELEVANT](#)

Why Multisite Churches Work in Rural America

In the small towns of Kansas multisite churches using video sermons are thriving in communities that have not been able to support new churches in the past. With the time and cost savings of outsourcing sermons, bulletins, curriculum, and other aspects of church administration, these smaller town congregations are able to focus on pastoral work.

[Christianity Today](#)

How to Avoid Ministry Burn Out

Pastors can avoid burnout in ministry by setting up support networks of friends who can ask hard questions and help them develop healthy habits. Everyone needs to develop a healthy way to relieve stress and enough self-awareness to realize what the signs of unhealthy are.

[Unseminary](#)

Mystic Soul Project Seeks Roots of Prayer Tradition

Teresa Pasquale Mateus, a trauma therapist and author of *Sacred Wounds: A Path to Healing from Spiritual Trauma* has launched the Mystic Soul Project in Chicago in order to help Christians reconnect with the roots of their faith in the contemplative tradition and link it with activism. The group has been concerned that too many white Christians have overlooked the roles of women and colored people in the history of the church.

[Religion Dispatches](#)