



# WEEK 1 / DEVOTION

**Read: Matthew 7:7-12**

*What if we as United Methodists, located in every corner of the West Virginia Conference, really took the time this Lent to fast, pray and listen for God's call to respond to the opioid epidemic?*

**Fast:** What if we set aside food for a day or a meal? What if when we felt a pang of hunger, we stopped what we were doing and prayed for those who hunger uncontrollably for an opioid? What if we took the time to think about how the addicted person hungers every day for this drug, to the expense of their health, their family and their future? If skipping a meal makes us miserable and irritable along with that little voice in our head that tries to get us to cheat on our fast, how does the person caught in addiction feel every day?

**Pray:** What if we set aside time to ask God for guidance? What if we honestly asked God our questions about addiction, and shouted out our fears and frustrations about the addicted? What if we asked God to make clear what our (mine and yours) calling is to respond to this epidemic? What if we asked what our church's calling is? What if we intentionally prayed for the healing of those who suffer from substance abuse disorder, healing for their families, and healing for our communities?

**Listen:** What if, throughout this time of Lent, we listened for God's call on our lives? What if we listened for a loud booming voice or a still quiet voice or God's guidance in a trusted friend or in the voice of a complete stranger? What if we listened for God's guidance in the crazy busy-ness of the day and in the quiet of our nightly dreams?

**Respond:** When God calls the body of Christ – everybody part must respond. Now is the time. We all have a calling. We have all been blessed with specific gifts and graces that are needed to end the opioid epidemic. Is this scary? Yes indeed. Is this unfamiliar territory? Yes again. Is God with us? Absolutely!

It is not enough for us to open our church doors and wait for the epidemic to end. We must leave our sanctuaries and enter the battle. Onward Christian Soldiers!

## Opioids – One Family of Drugs

Our current epidemic with opioids began thousands of years ago when someone, most likely in the current area of Turkey, was looking for something to eat and decided to try some part of the seed pod of a poppy. This person's hunger was satisfied, and they had a unique feeling of wellbeing along with their headache being gone! This person told another person, and before long people were harvesting the poppy seeds and brewing them in tea or mixing them with wine.

Homer, the Greek author of Iliad and Odyssey wrote, "Into the bowl in which their wine was mixed, she slipped a drug that had the power of robbing grief and anger of their sting and banishing all painful memories. No one who swallowed this dissolved in their wine could shed a single tear that day, even for the death of his mother or father, or if they put his brother or his own son to the sword and he were there to see it done..."

Over time chemists changed the molecular makeup of the poppy and created opium. Just before the American Civil War, morphine was created from opium. Around the same time came the invention of the hypodermic needle, which helped morphine become a miracle drug for wounded soldiers facing horrible battle field surgeries.

Unfortunately, opium and morphine, while great at curbing pain, were very addictive. Heroin was created later during WWI with the hope of making morphine stronger but less addictive...it did not work.

Scientists later were able to create a manmade form of the opioid molecule and thus created hydrocodone, oxycodone, fentanyl and carfentanyl. No longer were the opioid painkillers labor intensive with growing and harvesting poppies, but could be massed produced in factories at a fraction of the cost. These manmade opioids were created for post-surgical use and end-of-life care (to comfort dying cancer patients).

Today we are caught in an addiction epidemic that can be fueled by opium, morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, heroin, methadone, fentanyl or carfentanyl, all chemically related to the poppy.

When your physician is helping you deal with pain issues, always ask if what you are being prescribed is an opioid and have a frank discussion about possible addiction issues and other pain reducing drugs that might not be so addictive.

**What If?**  
#WhatIfWV  
Fast. Pray. Listen. Respond.  
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**WEEK 1 / EDUCATION**