

Author questions  
Melford "Bud" Holland  
September, 2015

*Tell us a little about yourself and your background:*

I grew up in a little village, Falls View, in West Virginia. It is located about 30 miles east of Charleston on Route 60. In that village I had many aunts and uncles and even more cousins. The company owned the town in the early years. The consolidated grade school was there from grades 1-8. The high school was located in Gauley Bridge, located at the confluence of the Gauley and New Rivers. Both schools no longer function as schools but are used for other purposes. It was a wonderful place to grow up with many kids of all ages and opportunities to connect with one another in informal ways.

As a young boy I was drawn to nature and especially to flowers. I remember one yard that backed onto our alley that had beautiful flowers of many colors. I also like the willow trees and other trees in all seasons. So the natural beauty all around me became pictures in my mind that still grace my midst.

My father worked for the plant. My mother was a homemaker. I have an older sister, Nancy, who also has worked in the Episcopal Church for many years. We were a very close knit family. Nancy and I were blessed with wonderful parents. My love of travel started very early as I made maps of the country all the while imagining my travel to these distant lands. As it turned out I fulfilled my dreams as I have traveled to all 50 states and a number of other countries. So what drew me to photography, storytelling, and writing was birthed in me at a very young age.

Over the years I have enjoyed sports, travel, dancing, music, theatre, storytelling, writing, conversations with friends and strangers, and other ways I can carpe diem. I am married and my wife Annie and I have three children and seven grandchildren. Fortunately for us they live within 60 miles of us and enjoy their life and work in wonderful imaginative ways. Annie and I also have two dogs: Ty, a sheltie, and Cory, a black lab. They are devoted to us and we to them.

*What led you to write Advent Presence? What's the story behind the book? Why is it needed in the church today?*

I enjoyed working on this book. I get up very early in the morning and this is a good time to do some writing. I was honored to work on this book as the topic of Advent and the Advent Season itself has been a favorite of mine for many years. It seems to me that the Advent Season in some ways is a microcosm of life itself with remembrances, dreams of the future, and the present moments all converging in potentially life giving ways. It is also the season of my birth (December 6<sup>th</sup>) and our oldest child's birth (December 15<sup>th</sup>). It was in this season I was ordained priest. Either our family was getting together or planning to get together: both contributed to the specialness of the season. As I wrote this book I realized that it could well be written by countless others and is in ways we all engage with life in its breadth and depth as well as in its heartache and celebrations. Life is complicated for us all. So remembering can bring back times of renewal but the process can also bring into our consciousness again the pains and hurts of life. Advent is that time of blending together of our joys,

pains, struggles, hopes, and dreams into a precious little space that gives us a glimpse of life itself that is real and life-giving.

Writing is the act of committing ourselves to a feeling, thought, perspective, observation, and point of view about what is brewing inside us. So I would suggest to others who may be considering the practice of writing to be in touch as much as possible with what is going on inside of us as well as what is around us, to be as imaginative as we can be of what we may yearn for in our future, and seek to be as honest as we can be of what is being shared (or has been shared) with us from others in their books, experiences, and dances of life. We live in a global village. Our cries and hopes blend together in an unimaginable large mosaic that is ever changing as life is about change and transition.

*What would you like to share with our readers about the future of the church?*

We live on such a small plane within a relatively small galaxy. My journey in life has generally taken me both to the particularity of community and communities but also to expand my horizons to be affected and formed by life as others live it. If God is about creation, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, justice, growth, learning, love, hope, promise.....then I believe that is what I need to embrace and allow to embrace me. Yes, I feel discouraged from time to time about the church and exclusive claims about who is right and who is wrong. But I remain optimistic about the created order, about God's involvement in our world that allows (encourages) mutual creative activity, and humanity at its core. This also means that I need to speak and live a life that is yearning to live and speak through me and make no peace with oppression, degradation, or de-valuing human beings in any form. So my journey is one of incarnation—what happens in the flesh of our existence and in our lives does in fact matter.

*What do you want your tombstone to say?*

I remember seeing a tombstone outside Oxford, England. It read: “He loved deeply and was deeply loved”. If I have any words on my tombstone, I hope it would be those words if others feel they reflect who I have tried to be. Being identified just by name with date of birth and date of death also works.

*What inspires you?*

I am inspired by the courageous, faithful acts of other—often in the face of great difficulty.

*If you could solve one big problem in the world today, what would it be and why?*

If I could do my part in helping the world respect, honor, and love one another that would seem to be an effort and purpose worth giving my life to accomplish.

*How do you understand heaven?*

Heaven is a present reality experienced in forgiveness, healing, presence of God, and so many

difference ways in which life is given new birth. I also believe it is a future hope and is a gift, not earned, by God. It is a state of being in which we are surrounded by an unmerited love that knows no bounds but is known and experienced as grace.

*What's next for you?*

I hope to continue writing and am working on a project filled with stories and learnings from friends and strangers. In addition I am contemplating the publication of some of my photographs along with some writing about them.

I never want to get too far from people who are living on the margins of life. There is the possibility of a mutuality of learning with others that is compelling in addition to seeking to be a good steward of the gifts and resources entrusted to me.

I also want to be in touch with my family even more and to be open to be surprised by what might happen next. Life is an adventure and it is better for me when shared with others.