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*The Candleberry Tales*

by Karl D. Lehman

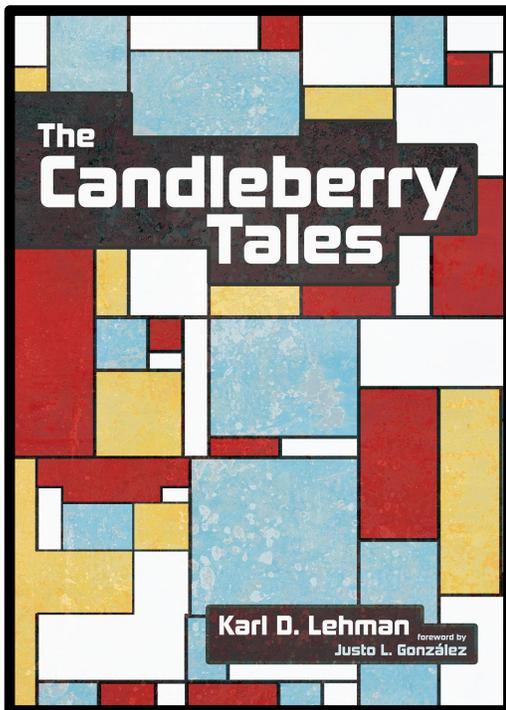
Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers

9798385246021 / paperback / \$22/£17/AU\$35

[www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com)

## New Title from Karl D. Lehman

### *The Candleberry Tales*



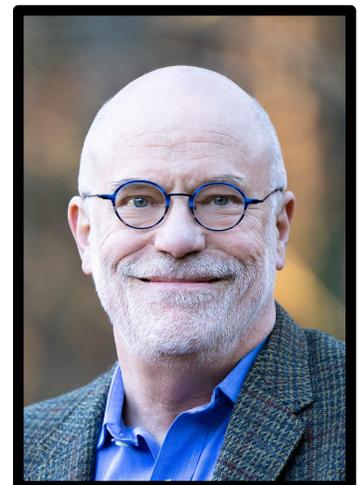
*The Candleberry Tales* is a collection of humorous and often fanciful modern-day parables told by a group of pastors heading to a Georgia mountain retreat center. In the tales, readers will meet a mouse who is a theologian, a sect that communicates with outsiders by quoting the King James Bible, a brave young girl who challenges her town's leaders, and other memorable characters. These tales illustrate important themes from the Gospels and will challenge various aspects of the modern practice of Christianity using humor instead of polemical critiques.

The men, women, children, and mice in *The Candleberry Tales* are family members, employees, clergy, churchgoers, and academics—they engage their faith not in isolation but among the people they encounter. Likewise, Gospel parables are never about “lone rangers.” They are about messy encounters between people. And in the case of *The Candleberry Tales*, encounters can be very messy, indeed.

Whether readers are new to faith, a longtime pilgrim, or have become wholly disengaged,

this book can offer a fresh look at the Gospels and make audiences laugh at the same time.

**Karl D. Lehman** is a graduate of the University of Maryland and Wesley Theological Seminary. For over twenty-five years he served as the CEO of Childkind, a nonprofit agency serving children with medical complexity. Lehman received several awards for his advocacy for children with disabilities and their families. He also worked for an ecumenical publisher, for a US presidential campaign, and for banks in Washington, DC. He received several awards, including the Big Voice for Georgia's Children and the Outstanding Advocacy for Children with Developmental Disabilities. Lehman resides in Georgia with his beloved wife and son.



## Interview with Karl D. Lehman

### **What inspired you to write *The Candleberry Tales*?**

Any cursory review of book catalogues, online and in print, documents the fact that there is already a plethora of faith-based polemical works that critique the practice of Christian faith in our contemporary world. There are few if any, however, that use humor as a means to help readers, individually or in groups, explore faith in a nonthreatening environment. This is why I wrote “The Candleberry Tales.”

The tales embrace the imperfect, sometimes absurd nature of human attempts to live out the Gospel. They show that grace often arrives in unexpected forms—through conflict, confusion, and laughter. Each parable invites theological reflection through narrative, not dogma. I use humor and allegory to provoke thought about God, authority, hope, and the mystery of divine presence in everyday life.

### **Is there a favorite character or story in *The Candleberry Tales*?**

One of my favorite characters in “The Candleberry Tales” is the Rev. Harvey Stilton, a minister who is more comfortable with efficiency methodology in the delivery of pastoral services to his congregation than he is in the thoughtful and prayerful delivery of faith-based care.

As Rev. Stilton encounters a mega-church evangelist in his community who is drawing congregants away from local parishes, his life and service as a pastor is transformed in ways he would not have ever envisioned.

### **Is there a study guide for *The Candleberry Tales*? If so, how does one get a copy?**

There is a free study guide for “The Candleberry Tales” and it can be downloaded from my website, [klehman.net](http://klehman.net)

## An Excerpt from *The Candleberry Tales*

“Decently, in order, and with utmost efficiency,” Rev. Harvey Stilton would tell his parishioners again and again.

Enter his study, and you step into a world illuminated by the men and women who gave their lives in service to humankind’s endless struggle against inefficiency. Perched on the mantel high above the fireplace is a portrait of the person who, to Harvey, was the greatest one of them all: Mary Anderson, inventor of the swinging arm windshield wiper now used in nearly every truck and car the world over. Move deeper into the office and you will see scores of pictures and statuettes of other famous and not-so-famous inventors on the walls or scattered about on the tables and bookshelves. Within this room Rev. Harvey Stilton can submerge himself in that vast sea of collective genius possessed by these giants of the patent pending. To Harvey, their creativity and inquisitiveness is a model for ministry he has followed for nearly forty years.

When Harvey is alone in his idea-incubating study, his cup of creative genius runneth over. Ten years ago on a Wednesday morning, Rev. Stilton hatched a new design for the offering plate. The brass, red-velvet-lined, bowl-shaped plate never made sense to him. By the time the ushers returned to the altar, the offering plates were, on a good Sunday, a chaotic mess of checks, cash, envelopes, notes, and loose change, an egregious affront to his sense of decency, order, and utmost efficiency. In his upper-room workshop, Harvey constructed a rectangular shellacked wooden offering plate with small compartments—for checks, for cash, for envelopes, for loose change, and for miscellanea. Actually, his offering organizer was Harvey’s twenty-third patent. It was only five years ago that Rev. Harvey Stilton conceived of his most ingenious, most stupendous time-saving device of all: the incomparable Roto-Sermon machine.

Alone that Wednesday morning, several years ago, Harvey had a brilliant idea. “I could automate the production of sermons!” he declared with excitement.

First, Harvey wrote seven sermons of identical length. Each sermon was divided into seven equally sized, sequentially numbered paragraphs. Using his electric typewriter, Rev. Stilton typed each paragraph on a large card, and to the back of each card he affixed Velcro. He then designed and built a great machine of pulleys and seven parallel conveyor belts. The sermon cards were affixed to the conveyor belts: Each of the seven first paragraphs were attached to the first belt, each of the seven second paragraphs to the second belt, and so forth. With the turn of a lever, various cogged gears would move the seven parallel belts, each at different speeds. Thus, with the first rotation, paragraph one would move one place, paragraph two would move two places, paragraph three, four places, paragraph four, eight places, and so on for paragraphs five, six, and seven. Through this ingenious use of independently moving paragraph-laden conveyor belts, the seven sermons could be re-arranged into thousands of sermons and would last the minister a very, very, long time. To Rev. Stilton, this invention was not entirely unlike Jesus feeding five thousand men plus women and children with five loaves of bread and two fish.

## Praise for *The Candleberry Tales*

“Lehman, a friend and colleague, has always been a thoughtful lay theologian. In *The Candleberry Tales*, he provides us with thoughtful, hilarious, and at times frustrating as well as challenging stories of Christian daily-life interactions. Humanizing and humorizing the situations of Christian leaders and congregations, Lehman dares the readers to think about God, sources of authority, congregational structures and community, institutional despair and hope, and the mystery of God in stories. English is not my native language, but I was able to follow the stories—their humor and challenges—and enjoy a time of theological reflection in an inter-cultural mode of thinking. I will certainly include some of these stories in my undergraduate classes as examples of story-telling theological reflections taking our emotions from laughter to intrigue and curiosity.”

—**Carlos F. Cardoza Orlandi, Frederick E. Roach Chair in World Christianity Studies,  
Baylor University**

“*The Candleberry Tales* has something of Chaucer’s wit and satire, poking fun at the eccentricities of those who presume to represent Christianity in our day. As with Chaucer, Lehman invites us to consider the varieties of religious experience in the church—or, rather, the churches—with their manifest foibles and eccentricities on full display. In these updated tales we meet the twelve ‘Early County O’Postles’ on the road in a dilapidated old church bus, bound not for glory but for Camp Candleberry. As they share their tales, we discover their pieties and proclivities with their often delightful—if not also absurd—consequences. Along the way Lehman leaves no one unscathed, rendering every member of this ecumenical troupe with a suitable levity. These Tales serve as a reminder—if we needed one—that those who take up the mantle of ministry are no different than those who endure their sermons week by week, all of us—depending on your point of view—as delightful as we are ridiculous. Together, they exemplify the truth that the ongoing existence of the church and its ministers, on fulsome display here, is reason enough to believe in God’s patience or humor—and probably both.”

—**Mark S. Burrows, author of *Meister Eckhart’s Book of Darkness and Light:  
Meditations on the Path of the Wayless Way***

“Karl Lehman in *The Candleberry Tales* using his keen humor invites us to look at the Gospel in a fresh way. We are reminded that while our religious experiences may be messy and may look different for each of us, it continues to be an important part of one’s life. He also reminds us, as we read the journey of each character, that not only is it okay to have a sense of humor as we travel our own religious journey, a sense of humor may be necessary.”

—**Juanita Stedman, Executive Director, Together Georgia**

“In his book, *The Candleberry Tales*, Karl Lehman weaves a captivating story about the annual journey of eleven rural pastors traveling on a wobbly school bus through rural Georgia, who each take turns sharing outlandish and highly humorous stories themed by a scriptural reference. I highly recommend that you join them on their journey as they reveal not only their eclectic theological beliefs, but a refreshing critique on the future of the twenty-first-century church.”

—Tom Hagood, Pastor, Columbia Presbyterian Church,  
Decatur, Georgia

