

When Christmas Hurts

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

Not feeling Merry and Bright this Christmas? The holiday season, celebrating Advent and Christmas, and family get-togethers can be hard for those whose hearts are hurting. Grief, pain and loss affects us all and the first time you approach celebrating a special occasion after that loss, can be very difficult indeed. Families may find it especially hard if the parents are sad but feel they have to put on a brave front for the children. It may also be that Christmas just isn't a magical time—for some it can be a time of fear or deprivation. If you know someone who's sad this Christmas, we've got a ministry to help with that.

In the northern hemisphere it's called 'The Longest Night' but here in NZ, where our nights are short, it's commonly called a 'Blue Christmas'. Many parishes are now having a Blue service to provide a place for grief to be expressed and acknowledged. In these strange times of a global pandemic, we are all adjusting to change, loss of freedom, and an increase of fear, so this therapeutic practise may be what we all need this year. The service is gentle, contemplative, sometimes with candles and flowers, often with soothing music—anything that allows people time to remember and express their love and loss, and come away comforted.

A Christmas service traditionally talks about Baby Jesus coming to dwell with us—Emmanuel. It's about

a God of Love and Compassion who comes to us in our humanity, full of mess and pain, into our everyday lives, to bring us peace, forgiveness and hope. There's no doubt that the world needs to hear this message of comfort now.

A Blue service is about nurturing people and is ideal for inviting the non-churched in to a safe, quiet space. It can take some preparation and setup, but it's worth it. What better time, than at Christmas, to invite the sad or lonely into an encounter with the hope that Jesus' birth can bring.

So let's use this as an outreach this Christmas time, and invite friends, family and neighbours along to express their very real pain, but be encouraged to shift from loss to comfort and hope.

MY FIRST CHRISTMAS IN HEAVEN

I SEE THE COUNTLESS CHRISTMAS TREES AROUND THE WORLD BELOW,
WITH TINY LIGHTS, LIKE HEAVEN'S STARS, REFLECTING ON THE SNOW.
THE SIGHT IS SO SPECTACULAR, PLEASE WIPE AWAY THAT TEAR,
FOR I AM SPENDING CHRISTMAS WITH JESUS CHRIST THIS YEAR.

I HEAR THE MANY CHRISTMAS SONGS THAT PEOPLE HOLD SO DEAR,
BUT THE SOUNDS OF MUSIC CAN'T COMPARE WITH THE CHRISTMAS CHOIR
UP HERE.

I HAVE NO WORDS TO TELL YOU, THE JOY THEIR VOICES BRING,
FOR IT IS BEYOND DESCRIPTION, TO HEAR THE ANGELS SING.

I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU MISS ME. I SEE THE PAIN INSIDE YOUR HEART,
BUT I AM NOT SO FAR AWAY. WE REALLY AREN'T APART.
SO BE HAPPY FOR ME DEAR ONES. YOU KNOW I HOLD YOU DEAR,
AND BE GLAD I'M SPENDING CHRISTMAS,
WITH JESUS CHRIST THIS YEAR.

I SEND YOU EACH A SPECIAL GIFT, FROM MY HEAVENLY HOME ABOVE.
I SEND YOU EACH A MEMORY OF, MY LINDYING LOVE.
AFTER ALL "LOVE" IS THE GIFT, MORE PRECIOUS THAN PURE GOLD.
IT WAS ALWAYS MOST IMPORTANT IN THE STORIES JESUS TOLD.

PLEASE LOVE AND KEEP EACH OTHER, AS MY FATHER SAID TO DO,
FOR I CAN'T COUNT THE BLESSING OR LOVE HE HAS FOR EACH OF YOU.
SO HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND WIPE AWAY THAT TEAR,
REMEMBER, I'M SPENDING CHRISTMAS, WITH JESUS CHRIST THIS YEAR.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

If you lost a Christian loved-one this year, "My First Christmas In Heaven" is a poem that may bring some comfort. It has been credited to Wanda Bencke.

Want to talk about your grief and loss?

South Canterbury: The Oceans Grief and Loss programme is a peer support short course for people of all ages run by our own Anglican Care service out of South Canterbury. Run in small groups with two trained facilitators, each person gets a chance to voice their grief and find ways to move forward.

The programme is tailored to meet the individual needs of either children, teens or adults.

The environment is safe and focuses on building on each person's strengths and finding helpful ways for those grieving to adjust their relationship with the deceased while continuing to honour the love-bond itself. Note in 2021, they are hoping to offer some online courses via Zoom to help out those who may have travel or babysitter needs. www.anglican care.org.nz/oceans-grief-loss

Christchurch: The Seasons for Growth programme is also a peer support short course on grief and change run by Anglican Care Community Development in Christchurch. This programme is based on the "Good Grief"

programme from Australia and can be done in a one-off seminar, a series of weekly sessions or an intensive retreat-style two-day course. It provides information on how to manage change in our lives, such as the loss of a loved one, job, property, marriage or as a result of illness, and focusses on practical steps to recovery, including better stress management, and personal growth. www.accd.org.nz/community-activity/seasons-for-growth

Westland: During Advent a blue Christmas tree (literally blue) is set up in a café in Harihari and people are invited to write on cards to decorate the tree. Support services including grief counselling are available from Claire Robertson in Greymouth. www.westcoastpho.org.nz

Where can I find a Blue Christmas Service?

When this magazine went to print it was a little early to have all the Blue Christmas Service dates and times. However, keep an eye on our website and Facebook pages as once we know who is having a Blue Christmas Service, we will post their details for you. Visit: www.anglicanlife.org.nz or www.facebook.com/AnglicanDioceseofChristchurch

6 COMFORTING VERSES FOR A BROKEN HEART

THE LORD HEALS THE BROKEN HEARTED
AND BANDAGES ALL THEIR WOUNDS

PSALM 147: 3, NLT

CASTING ALL YOUR CARES UPON
HIM, FOR HE CARETH FOR YOU
I PETER 5:7, KJV

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR
THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED
MATHEW 5:4, NLT

YOU KEEP TRACK OF ALL MY SORROWS,
YOU HAVE COLLECTED ALL MY TEARS IN A
BOTTLE. YOU HAVE RECORDED THEM IN
YOUR BOOK PSALM 56:8, NLT

MY COMFORT IN MY SUFFERING IS
THIS: YOUR PROMISE PRESERVES MY
LIFE PSALM 119:50, NIV

FROM THE END OF THE EARTH, I CALL YOU,
WHEN MY HEART IS FAINT; LEAD ME TO THE
ROCK HIGHER THAN I
PSALM 61:2, NLT



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Blue Christmas resources available

Clergy and laity interested in finding resources for a Blue Christmas service, please go to our website under resources and click on the Blue Christmas information there. It includes memorial activities, Scriptures, music, art ideas, and links to formats, websites and other resources.