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Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling,
consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

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Blue Christmas

sadness and grief. For those who suffer during this holiday time, it is good news to know that we are in the company of Mary and Joseph, kings and shepherds, and especially a tiny baby lying on a straw bed, all of whom were uncomfortable, frightened and confused. While the rest of the world has gone overboard with other reasons for celebrating, we can remember that the main characters in this drama were feeling loneliness, fear, sadness and grief. The story unfolds to reveal that a Child was born, whose name was prophesied to be "Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." He was no stranger to pain, and from the first, those most intimately involved with Him were no strangers to pain either.

Take a break from routine celebrations and consider some alternatives. Celebrate quietly; reflecting on the miracle of new life in the midst of apparent chaos. It might be a quieter Christmas than usual for you; be sure

to rest, reflect and take time for yourself. A "Blue Christmas" service, held at many churches, can be a helpful way to re-think Christmas.

The weeks before Christmas, called Advent, are being commemorated more and more in many churches. Decorations are kept to a minimum and a wreath is displayed with three blue or purple candles, the liturgical colors symbolic of reflection and waiting. One candle is pink, to recall the joy and hope in His coming. The church sets aside these days to help us remember the times of waiting, not only in the past, but the hope we have in our present waiting, and as we wait for the second coming when Jesus returns in glory. The stories of Advent parallel our own stories of waiting and hoping and our own stories of grief and suffering. Hope glitters through the evergreens as we remember that God came through in His promises to His people, and He will do the same for you as you grieve and weep.

Two thousand years before the birth of Jesus the Old Testament prophet Isaiah shouted, "Comfort, comfort my people." He reminds us that a "virgin shall conceive, and a child shall be born, and His name shall be Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." "Fear not," the angels remind us, over and over.

It's scary and lonely and dark, but God is with us. In the quiet, lonely, tearful times, remember: He is with us. Emmanuel. Fear not.



Dr. Janet Irvine is a
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She enjoys working with clients in
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PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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Blue Christmas

■ by Dr. Janet Irvine, Licensed Clinical Psychologist

In 1974, a delightful little book was published called *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* by Barbara Robinson. A desperate Sunday School director offered donuts to any child who would show up to practice for the yearly Christmas pageant. Several "unchurched" kids from the wrong side of town turned up for the free donuts, and to everyone's horror, stayed on to take part in the pageant. The Herdmans lie, cheat, steal and smoke cigars. They bullied the church kids out of the prime pageant roles.

Tragedy, fear, and suffering integral to the first Christmas.

What was a very funny little book turned out to be a very thought provoking book. The kids had never heard the Christmas story before and were horrified by the

events the rest of the church members had heard all their lives. They considered the Wise Men to be spies and King Herod the worst man in the world. Their shocking, intensely negative response to a favorite story rocked the church, which had become immune to this saccharine, hallowed story. Many had never stopped to realize the tragedy, fear and suffering that was necessary and integral to the first Christmas. The story left the Herdman kids enraged, shocked, and befuddled that such things could happen to a baby born to save the world. **For me, the book opened my eyes to the extremes that God went to in order to send His son into our world.**

A jostling, uncomfortable ride for Mary; no room at an Inn, far away from the comforts of family and home lying in a dirty stable on straw, a mean king who tried to trick the magi—all of these events incensed the kids, and made me stop and pause to wonder just how much pain, suffering and unfairness is part of the Christmas story. It was a painful, befuddling time for Mary and Joseph; alone and afraid; with strangers reporting visions of frightening celestial beings, and magi tracking them down with gifts that



Hermann Kaulbach - Weinende Madonna (Weeping Madonna)

were actually more appropriate for a funeral.

Many Christmas celebrations have forgotten these pieces of the story. And all that celebrating has left many people feeling it is a time of great loneliness, fear,

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■ by Lynne B. Scherschel, MS, LMFT

After Christmas has passed, do you ever feel like you missed it? Many of us have become so immersed in our culture of holiday busyness and fatigue that as Christmas nears, we just want to get it over with so we can rest! If this sounds all too familiar, you might want to make some changes NOW in order to make the day special without breaking your back or your bank account. Below are some ideas to consider:

1. You may need to eliminate some activities and expenses in order to focus in on the real meaning of Christmas. Discuss now with your family/friends which of your traditions are most meaningful to you and which might be eliminated, at least on a trial basis for this year. Then mark your calendars accordingly, rewrite your Christmas budget, and try to complete your gift shopping before Thanksgiving. It might be helpful to list all tasks to be done and then schedule them (including wrapping, decorating, cooking, etc.) on your calendar, so that you don't forget and end up having to do them at the last minute. Don't forget to put Christmas Eve/Day church services on your calendar and schedule other last-minute tasks around them.
2. Be sure to schedule times to rest before, during, and after Christmas. You don't want to be too tired to enjoy the special traditions you've chosen to observe.
3. Now that you have made a space, you will actually have time to focus on Jesus and the amazing Gift He is. Perhaps you could find a Christmas devotional that you/family can use throughout the month of December. Choose NOW to order it, and for younger children, be sure to have on hand a number of age-appropriate Christian books to read to them daily. A special time for family prayer would also be a good focus.
4. A nativity scene with all of the "players" can be a fun way to keep the story alive for young children on a day-to-day basis. I know a family who began the month with only the animals in the stable, baby Jesus hidden in a drawer, wise men on the east side of the room, Mary and Joseph in another location at a distance from the stable, etc. Each day someone would be moved a little closer, until on Christmas Eve Mary and Joseph reached the stable with others following, and baby Jesus was placed in the manger last.
5. Since we celebrate Christmas because of God's Gift to us, how about considering giving of yourself to others, as one of your new traditions. People in hospitals, nursing/rehab facilities, and homeless shelters can be encouraged by Christians caroling or providing a smile and a small gift (check with facility re what is appropriate).
6. A Christian advent calendar can

help all of us of any age to stay focused on Jesus. Many of these have a place for a piece of candy or trinket. Consider placing a scriptural Christmas-related promise in each one instead or in addition.

7. One of our traditions when my children were still at home was to place a non-tangible gift to Jesus in a special ornament for each person. The gift might be to obey parents better, to do something for someone else, to spend special time with Him, etc.
8. In the end it is also important to maintain some time in the day to let the children play with their new toys and to just relax with your special people and enjoy them. They are God's gifts to you!

Celebrate His birth!
You don't want to miss it!



Lynne Scherschel is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist. She sees clients in our Schererville, IN location.

Helping the Suicide Survivor

■ by Deborah Mitchell, MS, LMFT



Be present for them...don't avoid them.
Listen IF they want to talk.

It was hard to decide on a direction for this article because the suicide of someone close causes great pain in many different ways. So I decided to address one specific area that has been very hard for a close friend who grieves her brother's suicide, and for others that I've counseled.

Perception of Judgement

There is a frequent perception of being judged and condemned by the body of Christ - with judgment on the person who committed suicide AND those close to him or her. I am extremely sad to write that this perception can be based on reality. Whether judgment really exists, the pain that is created is real.

For some, strong core beliefs about suicide create great difficulty in reaching out to those left behind. For many others in the Body of Christ, they have no idea what to say or do for those who are grieving such a horrific loss.

Here is what the Word of God admonishes us to do:

*"...let everything you say be good and helpful,
so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them." ~ Ephesians 4:29*

*"Always be humble and gentle...Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit,
binding yourselves together with peace." ~ Ephesians 4:2a, 3*

*"Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy,
kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." ~ Colossians 3:12*

"Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony..." ~ Colossians 3:14

Treat those grieving like people who are grieving. Be present for them...don't avoid them. Listen IF they want to talk. Look for ways to help... do they need a babysitter while shopping for something to wear to the funeral or making arrangements? Does the lawn need mowing or does the driveway need shoveling before out-of-town guests come? What about taking a friend to see a movie so they can avoid real life for a couple hours?

And most of all, consider if your words are kind, encouraging, and loving. May we, as the Body of Christ, be His hands - helping bind the wounds and heal the broken-hearted through the power of His Spirit. ■



Debi is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist. She enjoys working with individuals, couples and families in our Schererville, IN location.

New Staff



Laura Goossens, MSW, LCSW
Licensed Clinical Social Worker
New Lenox & Tinley Park, IL locations

Her experience and interests include helping individuals with anxiety, depression, spiritual issues, relationship and marital issues, grief, women's issues, low self-esteem, stress, chronic disease, and life transitions and conflicts. Laura earned her Master's in Social Work from Governor's State University, University Park, IL and her BA in Social Work from Olivet Nazarene University, Bourbonnais, IL.



Jennifer Ziegler, MA, LAMFT
Licensed Associate Marriage & Family Therapist
Orland Park, IL location

Jennifer has experience in both clinical and ministry contexts with a variety of issues including anxiety, depression, sexual abuse, trauma, ministry struggles, compulsive behaviors, parenting concerns, addictions and relationship issues. Professional interests include the lasting effects of trauma, the role of imagination in the healing process and caring well for ministry families. Jennifer earned both her MA in Marriage and Family Therapy and her BA in Christian Education from Wheaton College in Wheaton, IL