



WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703

Jessie Palatucci
Online Communications Specialist

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Blue Christmas

I love the Holidays. The hopeful waiting of Advent. The trees and lights. The cookies and parties. It's all so exciting. But as I look forward to gathering with friends and family to celebrate Christmas this year, I am increasingly aware of how difficult this season can be for many.

This is a time when the scars and hurt that we hide so well during most of the year fight their way to the surface. It's hard to ignore the ache for those who have passed or the sorrow of seeing a loved one who is ill as we observe our long held traditions. The manic good cheer we see on T.V. can feel especially discordant for those battling loneliness and depression. And the pressure to out-gift, out-spend, and generally out-do our neighbors to put on the perfect holiday can be overwhelming.

I started reflecting on this over Thanksgiving. I had a fantastic time catching up with my large extended family. We laughed and told stories over plates of turkey and stuffing. But underneath the joy of being together, there was some genuine sadness. The echoes of those no longer present are hard to ignore. The stressful knowledge that some of us are sick or struggling financially and emotionally is there, just below the surface.

I know we are not unique. Every family, every individual at some point or other, faces heart break and hardship. And while it

can sometimes seem easier to sweep that all under the rug, I think we do a disservice to our families and ourselves when we pretend that everything is fine and we ignore that pain. No amount of tinsel and good cheer will cover it up.

So this year, instead of ignoring it, I'm going to try to face all aspects of the holidays head on. If I'm going to celebrate Christmas, let it include the good as well as the bad. Let us acknowledge the sad, lonely, and stressed in our midst and make room for that pain, as well as for hope. After all, isn't that what the first Christmas was about? About giving hope in hopeless times and trusting that even in the midst of challenge, exclusion, and poverty, that the world could change? That people and circumstances could be healed, improved, and transformed for the better?

That's what I want – hope. Instead of sparkling perfection, I want genuine connection with real people and real community to carry us all forward into the new year. I don't want to pretend that people aren't sad, that they aren't suffering. I want to try to truly see them, to support them if I'm able, and to have the courage to reach out in love and friendship.

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