

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

One day, when I was in seminary, our professor was explaining a writing assignment we were to complete about a "Blue Christmas" service. I could tell from the looks on some of my classmates' faces, that they had no idea what he meant. (Perhaps they were thinking--Is a Blue Christmas service a time of worship when artificial blue trees or blue decorations are displayed? Does a Blue Christmas service focus on the liturgical color of the Advent season? What does he mean?)

I raised my hand, and during the course of my question, explained the idea behind a Blue Christmas. It is a service that seeks to provide hope for those experiencing feelings of sadness and/or loss during the holiday season. It is a time for people who have lost a loved one, who are dealing with a chronic illness, or who have some other sadness/loss in their lives, to be comforted. Scripture passages, music, prayers, and sometimes other readings or a homily, are a part of the service. It offers a reminder that many people experience feelings of sadness and loss during the holidays. This is especially common, because the holidays are a time when families typically gather together to celebrate. Yet this year, even more families will experience one or more family members missing from their holiday tables.

During this time of the Coronavirus pandemic, many of us may be feeling a disconnection from loved ones. We probably won't be able to have holiday meals with our extended family members. We won't be able to travel and stay with them. So many of the things that we have done on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in year's past, we will not be able to do this year. For this reason, among many other reasons, it is important for us to acknowledge our sadness and our losses during the year, 2020. It is especially important for us to seek comfort from God and to have a shared worship experience with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

A Blue Christmas, can also be referred to as, "The Longest Night" service. It is held on December 21, which is the night with the most darkness. I recall attending a service after my husband and father died that was held at my home church. I found it to be very helpful, because it reminded me that I was not alone, that what I was experiencing was a normal part of losing a loved one(s), and that God, through this service, was providing me with comfort, today, and hope for tomorrow.

On Monday, December 21, we will distribute via email an online "The Longest Night" service created by the Southwestern Texas Synod of the ELCA. We will also distribute a bulletin complete with a full transcript of the service that is available electronically or via regular mail (for those who do not have internet access). This will be a time for us to watch the service as an assembly of St. Paul's Lutheran Church. It will also be a time for us to gather virtually, and/or in spirit, with hundreds/thousands of Lutherans throughout the United States.

Please join me in watching this service, and/or reading the worship materials sent to you. If you would like pastoral care, please send me an email, or leave a voice mail message at

608-865-1074 to let me know. My hope is that this service will bring you comfort during your time of loss, peace during your time of sadness, and hope during this time of great change and in the days to come. For even in the darkest of nights, God brings us hope, peace, joy and love both now and forever. Thanks be to God.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy