

INSIDE:

- + **News to Know**
- + **Blue Christmas**
- + **Forgiveness**



A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance
November 2020



News to Know

ECMA to Hold Board Meeting on Nov. 11

The Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) will hold its monthly board meeting at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 11, at CrossPoint Church, 13th and Harvest Road.

Anyone wishing to make a presentation to the board must schedule it in advance with the ECMA president at president@ourecma.com.

Church to Host Event for Operation Christmas Child

Messiah Lutheran Church, 2000 Main, is having a shoe box packing party for Operation Christmas Child at 9:45 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 15.

Operation Christmas Child is a ministry of Samaritan’s Purse, an international Christian relief organization headquartered in Boone, N.C. Each year thousands of individuals pack shoe boxes with toys, school supplies, and hygiene items that are sent to needy children around the world to demonstrate God’s love for them in a tangible way.

Since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has collected and delivered more than 178 million gift-filled shoe boxes to children in more than 160 countries and territories.

National Collection Week is Nov. 16-23. Donors will be greeted at curbside drop-offs by volunteers wearing personal protection equipment.

Those unable to attend the packing party may still pack gifts online. Operation Christmas Child’s Build a Shoebox Online program provides families and groups a creative way to rally together around a common goal, said Rachel Albin of Hays, Northwest Kansas area director. That program can be accessed at <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/buildonline/>.

More information about the packing party is available by calling Stacy Stults at (785) 650-3293.

Methodist Youth Offering Different Types of Yard Signs

For those tired of seeing political yard signs at every turn, the youth at Hays First United Methodist Church, 305 W. Seventh, are offering a different option.

For a \$10 donation, the youth are offering two different yard sign options—both designed to promote trust, unity and love.

Option A proclaims “Pray Wait Trust. Love Without Limits.” Option B offers “Faith Hope Love. Spread Kindness.” Donors may pick up their signs at the church, or the youth will deliver them.

Signs may be ordered by calling the church office at (785) 625-3408.



ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to one@ourecma.com.

The ECMA ONE Advisory Board will choose appropriate and timely submissions for publication. The columns in ONE represent the views of the author.

Volume 14, Issue 8 • ourecma.com • Copyright 2020 individual authors and ECMA

Advisory Board

Linn Ann Huntington
lhunting@fhsu.edu

Editor

Pastor Kevin Daniels
kevin@hayschristianchurch.org

Blue Christmas Service Scheduled

Pastor Brenda Rodger
Trinity Lutheran Church

*"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."
- Ecclesiastes 3:1*

Blue Christmas is a gentle, contemplative service for those who are carrying pain or loss during this season of celebration. Blue Christmas is not something new to me, but this will be the first time that I will be a part of this type of service. While it is sometimes difficult for us to be truly genuine about sharing in other people's success, promotions, joys, and blessings; sadly loss is something that unites us all even if we do not necessarily voice it to one another. My experience of loss will be named differently than yours and we will not grieve in the same way or within the same time frame. Loss is not just defined by death of a loved one. It is difficult to deal with loss of employment, the end of a marriage, the loss of health, the loss of abilities, or the loss of a home. This service is about allowing people the space to grieve whatever has brought them

sorrow and process their own feelings as they need to.

I began serving Trinity Lutheran Church in February of this year. In March, Covid-19 closed the building, until reopening again at the end of May. We now have services in the sanctuary and offered by Zoom. We now wear masks, social distance, and hand sanitizer is now available. Covid-19 has produced a new sense of loss on many levels in almost every aspect of our lives. People's coping abilities for this kind of change and loss has brought new challenges and uncomfortable circumstances. This can be grief disguised and unrecognized as we navigate new circumstances and new ways of doing life together, giving up what was comfortable and familiar. We feel sadness for what is now gone.

*"A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance."
- Ecclesiastes 3:4*

St Michael's Episcopal sanctuary will offer you a comfortable, safe space to

experience this Blue Christmas Service the first Sunday of Advent (November 29 at 6 p.m.). When life becomes difficult, hard, and lonely and when that same life brings joy, kindness, and love; as Christians we experience the words written by Solomon, that there are seasons to our lives and through it all we have a Savior that loves and cares what season we are in. Rev. Shay Craig and I hope that this service will bring comfort to you throughout this holiday season.

You are not alone in your grief. God knows what burdens your heart, he knows what brings you joy, he knows what season you are in. Together St. Michael's Episcopal and Trinity Lutheran are in this community to serve and care for you. We offer this Blue Christmas service that we believe will touch your life with hope and healing.

If you are unable to join us in person for this evening service, please consider reaching out to us so that we may hold you in prayer. I can be reached at tlcpr@eaglecom.net. Trinity Lutheran Church is located at 27th and Fort Street.

Blue Christmas

Reverend Shay Craig

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

On the 12th of December, exactly thirty years ago, my mother was in a house fire that resulted in severe burns over 80% of her body. She lived for thirty days in the burn unit of a regional hospital before succumbing, from December 12 to January 11.

Suffice it to say that the Christmas Holy Season is not my favorite. For years I could not listen to Christmas carols without hearing the tinny labored versions played in the elevator of the hospital. I dreaded Christmas cards that updated me on the Perfect Families of my acquaintance that had a Perfect Year and were Perfectly Happy. To this day, I do not allow a Christmas tree inside my house unless it has no lights on or near it.

I am one of an untold number of people for whom the winter holidays, Christmas, New Year's,

Epiphany, are emotionally draining. People who have lost loved ones, whose finances have changed or whose families have experienced divorce, deployment, unemployment, or trauma of any kind. For people like us, the holidays are not just "not much fun," they are a time of remembered hurt, deepening despair and amplified loneliness.

Over the years, I have learned a few things about how to do more than "get through" the holidays - how to find meaning and some solace in The Most Wonderful Time of the Year.

1) Grieving is entirely unique and personal. I may meet someone who has had a similar experience of loss or change, but my experience of grief is unique. No one feels it like I do - even if they can in some small way relate. (For this reason, I will be using a personal pronoun - "I" - in this article)

2) Grief is a river. I can try to stop it from flowing but it will find its way out somewhere. If I do not give it a place to flow out, it will come out when I least expect or want it. So, I give myself permission to feel sadness and loss. It is normal, natural, and authentic.

3) Death is not the only legitimate reason to grieve. Sadness comes from loss. When Christmas doesn't look like it did when we were kids, we feel loss. When Christmas didn't look like we think it should, we feel loss. Job loss, change in family structure, illness, dementia, deployment, or just changes in long standing traditions are all valid reasons to feel loss and sadness during the holidays.

4) Grief is part of, not other than, all other emotion. I can feel loss and sadness in the midst of the joy of the Christmas lights. I can be grateful for the presence

Blue Christmas (Continued)

of my kids, and also miss my Mom.

5) I am never alone.

Whether or not my friends understand my pain, they want to be present for me. When I look around the room at a party, I am looking at other people who are sad, I just don't know it. And I am the beloved child of a God who suffers with me, walks alongside my pain, and comforts me with a love that passes all understanding.

Out of my grief, I have come to value the yearly tradition of a Blue Christmas service. This service is a Christian church service that is designed to help us find words for what we are feeling, to say prayers and sing songs that name our experiences and our emotions, and that remind us that even though we are not "Holly Jolly" like the rest of the Christian world, we are not alone. We are surrounded by other people feeling just as we

do. And we are loved by a God who knows our suffering and bears our burdens with us. This year St. Michael's Episcopal Church and Trinity Lutheran Church will hold this service in the evening on the first Sunday of Advent (November 29 at 6 p.m.) at St. Michael's. Pastor Brenda and I would love to have you with us in person, or to pray for you by name, if you are unable to join us. Please feel free to email me at rev.shay.craig@gmail.com.

The Tough Work of Forgiveness

Cheryl Glassman

St. Nicholas of Myra Catholic Church

As we gear up for the holidays in 2020, many of our lives have changed, some for the good, some, not so much. Dealing with the effects of a world-wide pandemic in our own neck of the woods has created a plethora of frustrating events and situations. With that in mind, I know I, and many of those I know and love, have endured

circumstances placing us in a whirlwind of thoughts. Many of those thoughts have become angry words or attitudes. I myself have said things, and had individuals say things to me that are hurtful - moments that truly require an act of forgiveness. But, why worry about forgiveness? Is forgiveness really that important?

Forgiveness - which means to stop feeling

angry or resentful toward someone for an offense, flaw, or mistake - does not always occur immediately after a statement or situation happens; as a matter of fact, I have seen it where folks do not forgive a statement said in anger or frustration for years - families torn apart for generations!

Why is it sometimes hard to forgive? I think it's because what was done or

The Tough Work of Forgiveness (Continued)

said causes an internal emotional pain, hurting us or those we love. Does it make us a bad person if we cannot forgive right away? I don't believe it does. I believe forgiving someone is likened to grieving; healing comes to each of us at a different time, and can depend upon the amount of hurt or pain inflicted. Some people have endured terrible acts or statements directed toward them.

The problem that does occur is when we hold on to an event or statement, keeping it front and center, letting it eat away at our spirits. It's almost like being in a prison with pain and anger hovering over us. And sometimes, the pressure to forgive someone can also stress us out. So then, how are we supposed to do this forgiveness thing, anyway?

The most important thing we need to remember is that we NEVER walk a journey alone. Our Lord and Savior is always with us. Jesus

gives us so many ways to think about forgiving not only others, but also ourselves. We need to realize God's love surpasses all things and will lead us in the right direction if we would only seek Him.

We must also remember we are not perfect - we are human. That doesn't say that because we aren't perfect we shouldn't try to forgive, but rather, instead of letting anger get the best of us, we need to turn to God! We should pray that He enlightens us and fills our hearts with understanding - like it says in 1 Peter 5-7 - "Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you." And, if we as Christians believe God can forgive us, we should make an effort to forgive ourselves and others.

We also know that Jesus died that all may be forgiven: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" - 1 John 2:2. That

doesn't mean we can say, "Well then, let God forgive them." As children of God and followers of Christ, we are called to listen to God's word and learn from it. If we can put anger aside, forgive, and move the pain from the forefront of our lives, imagine the peace and joy that can begin to fill us!

On another note - sometimes we might be able to forgive, but can we truly forget? I don't think it's possible to forget, and besides, there are a lot of things I love to remember! When we are hurt or cause hurt, we should not let it stay in the front of our minds and hearts forever. We should make an effort to forgive, and move the memory to a comfortable, peaceful place, and pray that we might seek to follow in the footsteps of Christ, who forgave those who abandoned him, tortured, and killed him, and ultimately asked our loving God and Father to forgive us all.