

Blue Christmas Service

"When Christmas Hurts"
St. Paul's UCC Chapel
December 18, 2016
4:30 p.m.

The service begins in silence so all may participate in a time of reflection. As you enter the chapel, please pick up a paper Memory Star with a hangar and a pen. Following the second reading from Isaiah 40, people are invited to write on each Star the names of loved ones gone or their concerns for others or their own concerns. They are to be placed on the Christmas Tree later in the service.

WELCOME

Welcome to this Blue Christmas, a time when we can, with others, acknowledge the "blue" feelings we can have at Christmas time, the reasons for them, and offer them to God. In this service, we'll recognize that this is not a season of joy for everyone. This is the time of the shortest day and longest night of the year, when memories of past experiences and the pain of present reality can become overwhelming. We will invite you to reflect on the pain, the loneliness, and the sadness you may feel and offer it to God for healing and transformation. We pray that you will find hope and comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Always remember that God knows your pain and loves you unconditionally.

***OPENING CAROL** *"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"* **# 72 (1-4)**

*OPENING PRAYER

Pastor: God of mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent season for ourselves and for our families who live with painful thoughts and memories. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of Your Son, Jesus the Christ, who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise, and who taught us to pray...

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

A FIRST READING **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**

THE FIRST CANDLE IS LIGHTED

Pastor: We light this first candle to remember those in our time whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies. We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation, when all Creation waits for the Light.

All: We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

A period of silent reflection

A SECOND READING **Isaiah 40:1, 28-31**

THE SECOND CANDLE IS LIGHTED

Pastor: We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace.

All: We remember that through You all things are possible. Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into Your future.

A period of silent reflection

THE WRITING OF THE NAMES

A THIRD READING **Psalms 22: 1-2, 4-5, 9-11**

THE THIRD CANDLE IS LIGHTED

Pastor: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain. We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered. We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, in darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.

All: We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light, the light itself has not failed. We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be dark, the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.

A period of silent reflection

A FOURTH READING **Psalms 23**

THE FOURTH CANDLE IS LIGHTED

Pastor: We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Christmas, which begins in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable. We remember that our loving God who came to share this life with us and promises us comfort, peace, and light.

All: We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light, and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.

A period of silent reflection

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Response after each "Lord, hear our prayer":

And in Your merciful love, answer.

UNISON PRAYER

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this season, and give Thine angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for Thy love's sake. Amen.

*MEMORY STARS ARE PLACED ON THE TREE

Mark Schultz "A Different Kind of Christmas"

*CLOSING CAROL

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

#95 (1-3)

*BENEDICTION

Pastor: The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Holy God, let the light of Your Holy Spirit shine like these candles in the darkness, lighting the way for all who feel despairing, lost, or forgotten, and grant that it may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts that when we leave this place it may shine on, for us and for those we meet along the way. The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, both now and forever more. The peace of the Lord be always with you.

All: And also with you. Amen.

