

Blue Christmas

A Service of Wholeness and Healing

By Jean Givens
PHN leadership team member

Every year at First Presbyterian Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, the parish nurses provide a “Blue Christmas” – a service of wholeness and healing in early December. This year we explained it in our newsletter this way:

“Comfort, comfort my people, says God”

There are many moments in our lives when we need comfort. There are tough times when we yearn for consolation. The suffering people who looked for the long-awaited Messiah were given a hope-filled image of God in the writings of Isaiah. It expresses the belief that no matter what happens to us, God will be there to comfort and support us. Christmas can be a time for many when we are in need of that reassurance and comfort.

Perhaps we are grieving over the loss of a loved one, struggling with illness, or have experienced the loss of a job. We wonder how we will get through the holidays.

The Service of Wholeness and Healing with the theme of “Blue Christmas” was held Sunday, December 3 at 12:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary.

Those looking for comfort, hope, wholeness, and renewal joined the pastors and parish nurses for a time of quiet reflection and meaningful words and music. All shared in the good news of “God with us: Immanuel!”

The parish nurses design the worship and use readings from books of meditations, poetry and sacred readings. Our pastors participate in the service as well and have expressed gratitude that this is one service they do not have to plan!

We try to have a Service of Wholeness and Healing at least quarterly. We have tried many different times of day including a weekday lunch hour, but find that after church on Sunday is the best time to have the services for our congregation.

The parish nurses share the responsibility for writing and presenting the meditation/homily. These services usually are about 30 minutes in length. We have found that people who are grieving often find it difficult to concentrate for longer than that time period. We offer a support group that meets afterwards as well for those people who need some time to talk about their loss.

Blue Christmas

First Presbyterian Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Harp prelude

Call to Worship

Today we come looking for the Christ Child.

We come, bringing our hurts, our worries, our fears.

We come seeking relief from pain. With the psalmist of old we say,
**“O Lord, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.
Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low.”**

Hymn

“Abide with Me”

#543

Call to Confession

Dear Lord, we come to you this day to express our failures and confusion regarding our relationship with you:

You know that we come to you with heavy hearts that we find hard to unburden. It is particularly in this time of year when the darkness of long solstice nights collides with the brilliance of Christmas lights, that we find it hard to express our losses.

We may be confused, sad, lonely, and feeling our losses without remembering that you are always there to support us. We tend even toward anger at you, Lord, because we feel in some way it is your will that we are unhappy. Sometimes we feel cut off from you because we allow our many hurts to engulf us. We lack trust in you.

Open us to the understanding that you are the source of all love and we need not feel so alone in our grief. Grant us wisdom to know that you—most of all—can be trusted, and that you are with us, especially when we are at our absolute worst.

Assurance of Pardon

Let us open our lives to God’s healing presence and receive our Lord’s acceptance of us!

We know, God of Love, that you are always with us even in our very darkest of times. We know that you forgive our many transgressions and that by leaning into your infinite patience and strength, we receive your mercy, your care, and your grace today. Amen.

Hearing the Word

Old Testament
New Testament

Isaiah 40: 1-5; 28-31
John 14: 26-27

Prayer

God of mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent season for ourselves, and for our families and friends who live with the struggles of illness and the pain of loss. We ask for strength for today, courage for tomorrow, and peace for the past. We ask these things in the name of Christ, who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

Meditation “A God Who Cares”

Intercession for Healing

The God of strength moves within us;
the God of courage hears our distress.

The God of hope reveals wholeness to us;
the God of healing touches us when we are broken.

When the pain overwhelms us, when the burden is too heavy,
we turn to our God, who is sustaining and redeeming.

When there is loneliness, when there is isolation,
we turn to our God, who is loving and present.

For God created us, redeemed us and sustains us,
and we are not alone.

Lead us in your ways, O God, and bring us your healing touch.

The Lighting of the Candles and Healing Ritual with Oil

(You are invited to come forward and ask for a candle to be lighted for yourself or a loved one. If you chose, you may then also be anointed with oil. This anointing on your forehead is a very old gesture used to give strength on the journey of being healed and healing others. After people have returned to their seat, the following prayer will be offered.)

Prayer of Supplication

Our prayer of supplication is taken from a book entitled, *When We Gather* by James Kirk, a former pastor at our church.

Hymn ***“Still, Still, Still”*** **#47**

Benediction

May the power and the mystery go before us, to show us the way,
shine above us to lighten our world,
lie beneath us to bear us up,
walk with us and give us companionship,
and glow and flow within us to bring us joy.

Harp Postlude

Participants

Parish Nurses

Marcia Cowell, RN
Phyllis Curtis, RN
Jane Givens, RN

Pastors

Rev. Wayne Conner
Rev. Bill Fuerstenau
Rev. Kevin Holley

Harpist Organist

Carol Payne Smith
Janlee Richter

Credits

Presbyterian Parish Nurse Seminars (Santa Fe Seminar)
When We Gather, James Kirk

