



Helping to Change a Blue Christmas to a Bright Christmas

By Derl Keefer

Gospel Singer Elvis Presley sang a tune titled “Blue Christmas.” The premise of the ballad is that the person will have a blue Christmas without their loved one. He croons about blue snowflakes, blue memories, and just a plain blue, blue, blue, blue Christmas!

Many senior adults can relate to the words because their loved ones moved on and often left them behind. Far too many families have little to no contact with their senior relatives once they move into assisted or nursing care. For those left behind, the holidays could be full of memories of lost loved ones and endless loneliness.

A Blue Christmas Forecast

The population of senior adults age 65 and over has increased dramatically from 37.2 million Americans in 2006 to 49.2 million 10 years later and is zooming at lightning speed. Projections are off the charts with the best educated guess estimating that by 2060, this population will double to 98 million!

These numbers are overwhelming. We must remember that every number has a name; every name has a history and a story. Every story does matter to God, and if they matter to God, they should matter to us!

As Christians, we are called to love God and to love people who are in difficult situations. It is not enough to talk about Jesus’ love; we must act our speech. When we act kindly toward someone who is vulnerable, we are doing it for Jesus.

There is a great gap between the way God sees people and the way the world sees people. The goal of Christ is that every person is loved and connected with those who profess His love and leadership. His active love through us is how the world knows that we are children of God.

Meeting Loneliness Head On

The blue Christmas that many senior adults experience in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and their own homes should prompt us to ask an important question. How do we meet loneliness head on? During these pandemic days, the challenge grows stiffer! Months ago, we could open our homes...our most sacred space...to those individuals. As a church, we could offer food, our time, and our treasures to the most vulnerable seniors. We could make a physical impact in Christian love and service. We had the ability to visit people in nursing homes or assisted living facilities. There were opportunities to sing, share a gift, or simply talk with individuals. Not now! Most facilities can't allow anyone, including family members, inside the premise. Even going to someone's home as a group extends danger of spreading coronavirus to them, so we choose not to go out of respect—not fear.

How do we meet these challenges head on during COVID-19 days? How can we as Christians...the Church...help change a “Blue Christmas” to a “Bright Christmas” by bringing a note or act of cheer to stranded seniors?

From a Blue to Bright Christmas

A number of respected assisted care and nursing home leaders composed some practical activities the church can do to make it a brighter Christmas. These activities are a “pick and choose” list. You will want to contact the specific facility you will be working with as a church. During these pandemic days, each facility has its own rules as well as government directives. Individuals residing in their own homes will also benefit from some of these suggestions.

- Decorate trees surrounding the area.
- Collect stocking gifts to deliver for individuals or the whole facility.
- Carol from outside windows.
- Purchase wall calendars and notecards. Many places provide these items, but it helps to cut down on the cost of the facility.
- Purchase three hundred-piece or less puzzles, cards, dice for games. Provide enough so that residents can have one each. During the pandemic, residents are not allowed to share games with anyone but their roommate or staff.
- Homemade bird feeders can be gifts that may be placed outside windows. Help buy the birdseed, too.
- Provide personal care items such as soap, shampoo, body wash.
- Donate used working cellphones so they connect to Wi-Fi, music programs.
- Make videos with church choirs or praise teams and post on YouTube specifically for the facility to use on monitors or TVs.

- Write notes to individuals. My local church was doing this weekly for months until the nursing facility was not allowed to have cards from the outside. I hope that this policy will change as the situation with the pandemic changes. Residents love getting mail.

Sorry, Elvis, but a Blue Christmas can be changed to a Bright Christmas with everybody helping!