# A Blue Christmas Service



A service for those who have suffered loss or feel those losses deeply at Christmas.

The whole pace of the service is slow and allows for lots of silent time. This may be difficult for any children present, and it might be useful to provide a person who could meet the children’s needs as they go from a parent in the service to a play area and back again.

The refreshment time after the service is a part of the service. It is useful if there are empathetic caregivers primed to be there to listen and to refer appropriately.

There is no sermon but a short homily.

There will be no offering.

Advertising of the service may be throughout the neighbourhood of the faith community.

## Call

One: Come from your gifting to loved ones and near ones.
**All: We are ready to let the buying and selling of Christmas go.**One: Come from the place of meeting and greeting friends and family.
**All: We are ready to be quiet and wait.**One Come from the place of reunion and loud conversation.
**All: We are ready to ponder our loss and be quiet before the Holy One.**(Time of silent reflection)

## Hymn

*Voices United* 6 A Candle Is Burning

## A Time for Gently Greeting Those around You

(A recognition that in your sorrow and acute feelings of loss you are not on your own.)

## The Losses We Have Suffered

One: There are many losses in our lives:
the loss of a partner in life,
the loss of a grandparent,
the loss of a well-loved family member,
the loss of a good friend,
the loss of a loved one,
the loss of a pet,
the loss of taken-for-granted good health,
the loss of a cherished dream,
**All: We name our own losses silently, before God...**...moments of memory, the good ones and the hard ones, and reflection on the feelings that have been ours in loss. Some might want to share the name of a loved one long gone from among them but lovingly remembered. We pause and remember and reflect… (Time of silent reflection)

## Words from the Prophet Job

(Job 9:25‒31). These are old traditional words that reveal something of the despair and hopelessness that Job felt at a time of great loss.

The days race by not one of them good.
My life passes by like the swiftest boat,
as an eagle swooping down on a rabbit.
God throws me in a pit
and even my clothes are ashamed of me.

## Prayer of Approach

One: You, O God, are with us and for us,
in our constantly changing emotions, your love never changes.
**All: As we clash with the “holly jolly” Christmas,**One: your Spirit calms us.
**All: As we dearly wish for the days before our loss,**One: your Spirit comforts us.
**All: In those moments when it is difficult to feel anything at all,**One: your Spirit gives us hope.
**All: In those days and weeks when we longed for life to feel good again,**One: your Spirit would not let us go. **All: And today when we contrast our grief with the celebration of the holiday,**One: your Spirit is ready to bring us peace. (time of silent reflection)Eternal God,
**All: your love will never leave us,
no, your love will never leave us. Amen**

## Hymn

More Voices 90 Don’t Be Afraid

## Readings

A reading for those who feel grief today.

(The following is an example paraphrased from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and inspired by the blog [“Bonhoeffer on Why God Does Not Fill the Emptiness When a Loved One Dies,”](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/bonhoeffer-on-why-god-does-not-fill-the-emptiness-when-a-loved-one-dies/) thegospelcoalition.org. See also an [excerpt from Bonhoeffer’s writings](https://legacy.npr.org/programs/death/readings/spiritual/bonh.html) on legacy.npr.org.)

### ****God Does Not Close the Gap, Dietrich Bonhoeffer****

You have to simply carry on and win through. A huge gap is created when a loved one dies. God does not fill the gap but keeps it open, even at the cost of pain.

The more precious the memories, the harder the separation. The determination to keep on going after the death of the flesh of your flesh, bone of your bone, involves the hardest battle there is on earth, but victory can be won.

Psalm121 My helps comes from God
John 20:19‒21 God’s peaceRomans 8:18, 35, 38, 39 Nothing can separate you from the love of God

## Hymn

MV 83 Let My Spirit Always Sing
or a traditional carol like VU 44 It Came upon a Midnight Clear

## Blue Christmas Meditation

We greet one another today not so much as an act of friendship and recognition,
but because we who gather as a group share a common bond,
the bond of loss.

For some of you it may be the loss of a life’s partner or a family member,
for others it may be a good friend.
For some of you it may be the loss of a job or a long-held, cherished dream.
Each of you in your different way will feel that loss, feel it in the most sacred part of you, in the depth of what today is unfashionably called “the soul,”
and though you may want the loss to go away, it will not.

And we know that at this holiday time our losses are magnified by the spirit of the festive season.
This is the time when merriment and laughter rule, the time for the sharing of stories and having fun in the family circle.
This is the time when the emphasis is on gifts and giving, on good food and drink.
You will want to be a part of this, to welcome family and play with the children, but I also know your loss, your grief, will make itself known when you least expect.
The Merry Christmas is no way to counter loss, but the Christmas with the Spirit at the centre will help you through.
And if that happens, the tears will flow, health-giving tears will flow.
Christmas may seem to be the time when tears will be alien, unnatural.…
Take comfort, for today you are in the good company of those who have suffered loss, and this is a natural place for tears.…
And be assured God is not neutral to our sadness.

Two of our Bible readings, Psalm 121 and that familiar one from the Gospel of John, bring home the certainty that we are not alone.
In our grief God is with us and will never leave us.
“I will lift up my eyes to the hills―from where will my help come?”
The psalmist answers his own question in certain confidence: “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” And the psalmist concludes, “God will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore”
And those words of John’s gospel remind us that the peace of God will be ours and will never fade.

God shares grief with us, and God’s Spirit is to be found in those who encourage and support and listen carefully to us. And I want you in a few moments of silence to remember those who have cared for you in the hard times, the times of desolation and despair. (*moments of silent reflection*)We thank God for every one of them and for the many and life-bringing ways they have stayed with you.

Above all I want to commend you for taking the time to be here today and
for acknowledging your loss. And I will ask you to do the most difficult thing: Remember your loved one, Hold your loved one up before God. (*time of silent reflection*)

You have re-membered them, brought them back to your mind, your heart, your life, and there is joy and the deepest satisfaction in that. They are gone from this mortal sphere, but they can never be lost to God.
Who can separate us from the love of God?
Remember those words from the eighth chapter of Paul’s Letter to the Romans:
“[N]either death nor life…nor things present nor things to come…
nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation
will be able to separate us from the love of God” as we know it in Jesus Christ.
Those we love and have lost are held safe by God, embraced by the love of God,
and will be for all eternity.

This is the ultimate security for us, and so we are able to let those loved ones go
until that future time when we too will know and be known by the Blessed and Holy One.
And as you go from here, make the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John (14:1-your own. He said, “Set your troubled hearts at rest,
banish your fears,”
and know peace this Christmas time, the peace that the world cannot give,
God’s peace, “the peace that passes all understanding!” Amen

## Candle Lighting

Each congregant may choose to come to the front, light a candle, and say the name of the person for whom the candle is lit, or light a candle and say nothing. No pressure!

After each candle is lit the leader will say:

Leader: In your loss, (name of person lighting if known)*,* God is with you.

## Pastoral Prayer

One: When it is hard to see the way ahead,
**All: you are the Spirit that brings light, Loving God.** (Time of silent reflection)
One: When life lacks zest or purpose, and we long for the person who is lost,
**All: you are the Spirit that brings courage, Loving God.**(Time of silent reflection)
One: When we know of loved ones or family members who are hurting,
**All: you are the Spirit that enables us to listen and console, Loving God.**(Time of silent reflection)
One: When we look back to good times that are over and gone,
**All: you are the Spirit that revives significant memories
and enables us to share them, Loving God.**(Time of silent reflection)
One: As we remember those in our faith community who have suffered loss,
**All: you are the Spirit that calls us to ask the simple question, “How can we help them?”**(Time of silent reflection)
One: as we think of those refugees without hope worldwide/people at risk in their Ukrainian homes or other crying need,
**All: you, Loving God, are the Spirit of compassion that compels us to speak and act to bring change.**

One: And Loving God, when your Spirit seems gone from us,
**All: you give us the blessing of Jesus crucified and risen,
the pledge of your presence in time and beyond time.
Amen**

## The Lord’s Prayer

(Usual version of the faith community or sung)

## Hymn

VU 67 Silent Night, Holy Night

## Commissioning

One: God’s Spirit goes with you as you leave this service.
When you can fully join the festivities, God’s Spirit is with you.
When you want to just be on your own, God’s Spirit is with you as well.
When your loved ones are sensitive and caring, God’s Spirit is with you,
and when peace is hard to come by, God’s Spirit is with you as well.
In all your good days at Christmas and beyond,
in all those days when life is hard,
**All: God’s Spirit will never leave us.**

## Blessing

## Hymn

MV 90 Don’t Be Afraid

## Refreshments and Conversation

A time of both talking and listening

―David Sparks is a retired United Church of Canada minister living in Summerland, British Columbia. He is the author of the Prayers to Share, Pastoral Prayers to Share, and Responsive Prayers series of lectionary-based prayers (Wood Lake Publishing). He is also the author of Off to a Good Start and A Good Ending (United Church Publishing House).