

By Bill Husfelt

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The television commercials tell us that we're in the midst of the "festive season" and the "best time of the year" and while that may be true for many of us, it's not true for all of us. I am blessed that Christmas has always been a blessing to me but I know, unfortunately, many others don't share that sentiment.

Christmas is a time to be grateful for the gifts we have received and for our ability to bless other people but, for many, it's also a time of sadness and loss and grief. A popular social media meme notes "we are in the same storm but not in the same boat. Your ship can be shipwrecked and mine might not be. Or vice versa" and I think that's so true today. We are all facing some similar challenges but some of us are facing far more obstacles than others and some of us have amazing shipmates while others are facing the storm alone.

So, I think it's fitting this month for us to focus on making sure that we're doing all we can for those people who are around us ... both the ones we know and the ones we don't. December is a lovely time to catch up with an old friend, reconnect with a family member or check in with the elderly person who lives down the street from you.

During this month we can be bombarded with opportunities to give to charities, both time and money, and that can be overwhelming. We can't all give to everything but we can all give to something. Your gift, or blessing, this Christmas season can be as simple as a thank you card to someone who has helped you ... in these crazy times a "thank you" is becoming more and more valuable.

From a spiritual perspective, I like to try to remember that December is the most celebrated month in the world but it's also a time to reflect and to realize that we're not on this planet solely to help ourselves. We exist so that we can reach out and help others and love them as we are loved.

So, I invite you to take some time during this season of giving to consider what you can give to others. Again, it doesn't have to cost a penny ... your most precious gift is your time and there are many people in our world who will gladly, and gratefully, receive that amazing present.

I also hope you'll take the time to celebrate. We need to celebrate that we're here, that we're alive and that collectively we continue to make our way through a global pandemic and all of the challenges we're facing. It's easy to focus on what, and who, we've lost and how hard life can be at times but December is a great time for gratitude, reflection and giving.

As I get older, I find myself increasingly grateful just for my own good health and for the good health of those around me. And while all of those Christmas cookies are incredibly tempting, I'll be trying to hold back just a little this year in the name of good health and healthy decisions.

Our schools do an amazing job of bringing Christmas cheer to our community and to their students and so I hope your December includes at least one concert, choir performance, play, holiday presentation or something else featuring our students. All of our staff members are working to ensure that our children experience the joy of the Christmas season and we have an incredible cadre of "elves" working behind the scenes to do what they can to support our families who need a helping hand as well.

I do hope you'll consider joining us on Tuesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, as we showcase some of our student choirs and spend an evening singing Christmas Carols together at Papa Joe's Bayside. This event, sponsored by Bill Cramer Chevrolet Buick GMC, begins at 6 p.m. with a medley of student choirs and ends with an hour of old-fashioned caroling led by the Will Thompson Band. The event is free but we're asking participants to donate either a new, unwrapped toy or some kid-friendly snack items that we can use to spread Christmas cheer to those in need.

God Bless and stay safe!