

Uber Driver Goes Extra Mile

On his last day as an Uber driver, 31-year-old Army veteran Tim Letts decided to pick up a fare to earn a few extra dollars. He was directed to a passenger named Bill Sumiel at the Vascular Institute in Vineland, New Jersey.

Letts noticed that Sumiel, age 71, looked drained and lacking in energy, so he struck up a conversation. Sumiel revealed that he was suffering from kidney failure and receiving dialysis. Though he had been on the kidney transplant list for more than three years, he still hadn't found a donor.

Letts was impressed by the fact that Sumiel didn't feel sorry for himself and even continued being involved with his church and various civic groups. That's why he offered to donate his own kidney to Sumiel. Letts told *DelawareLive.com*, "Good people need good people to stand by them."

Letts proved to be a match, and the transplant surgery was a success. Regarding his act of selflessness, Letts said, "I saw somebody...that I felt I could make a difference for." A grateful Sumiel added, "God must have put me in that car."

Be rich in good works. (1 Timothy 6:18)

Guide me in performing small or large acts of kindness, Savior.

The Purpose of Advent

Catholic author Elizabeth Scalia has a Protestant friend who doesn't understand the purpose of Advent. Scalia explained to her that the season's traditions, from lighting colored candles to performing "light penances," are meant to call us out of our busy lives to focus on something—or Someone—higher.

Writing at *OurSundayVisitor.com*, Scalia says, "The world, beautiful as it is, is also full of spiritual potholes...Advent coaxes us out. We look up and there is a darker sky than before. The stars show more clearly, and they inspire us to hack through the stuff that has begun to imprison us within the year so that we may walk a freer path, made clear."

At the center of this spiritual journey is Jesus, whose coming we await. Scalia continues, "It is monumental, this coming—it is the coming of Love in a way never before (or since) encountered...When we pray, each day, 'Come, Lord Jesus,' we pray for this coming of Love... Advent is the Presence begun. The season helps us to make ourselves ready for Him—to make straight the paths in the wilderness of our fickle, changeable, distracted, all-too-human hearts."

Prepare the way of the Lord. (Isaiah 40:3)

Prepare my heart for Your coming, Jesus.

An Advent of Spiritual Growth

Writing at her blog *TheAnchoress.com*, Elizabeth Scalia explores specific ideas on making Advent a fruitful spiritual season: pray for people you see on social media who express pleas for help; increase your charitable giving; get off the internet one hour early every day and do something more useful, perhaps spiritual reading or visiting the Blessed Sacrament.

Also, Scalia suggests, “Walk over a cup of hot chocolate to the elderly neighbor whose kids are scattered about the country and may not be able to come by this year. Better yet, share a meal. Instead of speaking, force yourself to LISTEN to others, even if they’re not saying anything all that interesting or even if you disagree...To make a person feel seen and heard can go a long way toward them listening to you, in turn.”

Scalia concludes, “If you put even a small amount of effort into Advent this year, I promise that you will be glad of it—that each sunset, as you light a candle...you will note how outside is becoming dimmer and darker, while within you are becoming lighter, maybe even starting to glow.”

**If you...satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then
your light shall rise in the darkness.
(Isaiah 58:10)**

Light my way through this Advent, Jesus.

A Calling to Be Santa, Part 1

Considering that Ed Butchart didn't feel comfortable around kids, no one could have predicted he would one day become Santa Claus. But the former Marine experienced a literal "light bulb moment" that started pointing him in that direction.

Butchart's friend, who had cerebral palsy, asked him to change a light bulb in his home one day because he couldn't do it himself. That act of kindness sparked a desire in Butchart to do more good, so in 1986, he left his job as a salesman to create an organization called Friends of Disabled Adults and Children (FODAC), which provides free or low-cost wheelchairs and other equipment or services to those with disabilities.

As reported by *Christianity Today*, Butchart went on to become an ordained minister. When members of his church noticed that both his waistline and features resembled those of Santa Claus, they asked him to play the role for a Christmas program. He soon received requests to do the same in other venues, one of which led him to realize he could play a unique role in sharing God's love with others. More tomorrow...

Make every effort to support your faith with goodness. (2 Peter 1:5)

How can I be of service to others today, Messiah?

A Calling to Be Santa, Part 2

Ed Butchart went on to play Santa throughout the Atlanta area. One day, he noticed an adult woman bouncing excitedly in line to see him. When she reached him, he realized she was mentally challenged. The woman's mother told him, "You don't have to mess with her. She...ain't never been right." As reported in *Christianity Today*, Butchart responded, "She is also a child of God, and He loves her as much as He does any of His children, and so does Santa."

On another occasion, Butchart/Santa spotted a mother pushing a wheelchair with her four-year-old daughter, who suffered from multiple disabilities. He waved them over and treated the girl with loving tenderness. In addition, he noticed a problem with the wheelchair, so he told the mother to take it to Friends of Disabled Adults and Children for free fixing.

When the mother went there the next day, she was surprised to see Butchart and Santa were one and the same. She also revealed that the previous year's Santa looked at her daughter and said, "I'm not about to touch that kid." Butchart was horrified and vowed to always live up to Santa's image.

**Give justice to the weak and the orphan.
(Psalm 82:3)**

Remind me to be a reflection of Your divine love, Jesus.

A Calling to Be Santa, Part 3

Through his work with Friends of Disabled Adults and Children, Ed Butchart “has given equipment to more than 30,000 disabled people in 51 countries and 35 states,” reports *Christianity Today*. He also sees a divine side to his work as his alter ego, noting, “Santa Claus is a good place for [children] to learn about the unconditional love they will eventually understand comes from Christ.”

When those children ask Butchart questions about how reindeer can fly and Santa can come down chimneys, he shares some insights with them that are valuable for people of any age:

“On Christmas night, many years ago, God proved how much He loved the world when He sent us Jesus. And later, Jesus proved how much He loves us when He died on the cross.

“So that night, when God gave us Jesus, all the love in the world came together in an explosion of power. It’s the most powerful night in the world. The power that explodes is God’s love. That’s when wonderful things happen. Reindeer can fly and Santa can go down chimneys...[And] by being somebody’s Santa Claus, you’re emulating Christ.”

Love your neighbor as yourself.
(Matthew 22:39)

Christ, guide me to be somebody’s Santa this Christmas.

‘Don’t Panic or You’re Dead’

Though 101-year-old Lou Conter couldn’t attend the 2022 ceremony commemorating the Americans killed during the Japanese bombings of Pearl Harbor, he watched a livestream of the event. Conter, a sailor aboard the USS Arizona that fateful December 7th in 1941, told the *Associated Press*, “The 2,403 men that died are heroes. And we’ve got to honor them.”

Conter was one of the surviving sailors who tended to the injured after bombs turned the Arizona into a giant fireball. “The sailors only abandoned ship when their senior surviving officer was sure they had rescued all those still alive,” *AP* reported.

Conter endured other close calls as well. After becoming a pilot and being shot down in shark-infested waters near New Guinea, his crew expressed doubt they would survive. Conter’s response? “Baloney...Don’t panic or you’re dead.”

His instructions to tread water quietly kept them alive long enough for another plane to spot them and drop them a lifeboat.

Thank you to Lou Conter and all those like him, who served this country with strength and dignity.

Though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. (Psalm 27:3)

Bless all our wartime veterans, Savior.

Behold Your Mother

On her Twitter page, Christian author Beth Moore shared an emotional story from her past. It occurred when she and her husband were in their 20s, and one of their best couple friends were losing their preschool-age son to cancer.

Recalling the morning of the boy's passing, Moore writes, "The pain of his tiny body seemed to dissolve, and his expression turned to joy as he described Jesus in detail to his parents: 'See??? Right there!'"

The boy then mentioned a woman was with Jesus. His parents felt confused, wondering if it was a deceased relative. The boy responded, "No," as if they were silly for not knowing who she was. "[It's] Jesus' mommy!" he explained.

Moore concluded, "Soon, he was in the arms of Christ. We wept and wept, yes, racked with grief, but also wrecked over the tenderness of a Savior who just perhaps thought a little guy might find extra comfort in a mommy tagging along."

When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing beside her, He said to His mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then He said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'
(John 19:26-27)

*May Your mother's presence ease our struggles,
 Jesus.*

Advent Traditions

During the season of Advent, many traditions practiced throughout the world offer a glimpse of the varied ways we can awaken the spirit of anticipation for Jesus's birth.

St. Francis of Assisi initiated what has become one of Advent's most well-known traditions: the Nativity scene. After a visit to the Holy Land, Francis returned to Italy determined to recreate the humble scene of Christ's birth, so he requested and received permission from Pope Honourius III to stage a live Nativity in a cave near the village of Greccio. Nativity scenes with figurines soon became a hallmark of Italian homes.

In Poland, an old tradition is kept alive throughout Advent with the daily Roraty Mass, which begins in darkness, before sunrise, with worshipers carrying torches and lanterns. It ends after sunrise, with the light of day symbolizing Christ's birth.

And in Mexico, children take part in a procession called La Posada, in which they carry candles through the streets, sing songs, and reenact Bible stories, such as Joseph and Mary's search for a place to stay in preparation for Christ's birth.

Hold fast to what is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

May the Advent traditions I practice bring me closer to You, Holy Trinity.

Blue Christmas

The Christmas season is a joyful time of year, but for people enduring loss and struggle, it can feel overwhelming. That's why some Catholic churches have begun hosting a "Longest Night" or "Blue Christmas" prayer service to walk with people through their pain.

Kate Williams of Old St. Mary's Catholic Church in Chicago helped organize this event for her parish. She told *AmericaMagazine.org*, "It feels almost like salt in a wound when the air around you...[is] about rejoicing and happiness and family and togetherness—and that's just not true for [you]."

Father Ronald Knott of Louisville, Kentucky, agrees, and noted he was surprised by the amount of people who attended his first "Blue Christmas Mass" in 2011. He said, "It's a much bigger need in the church than I think a lot of people are aware of. They might know one or two people who are grieving, but they come out of the woodwork."

Williams added, "It's appropriate to take space and time to acknowledge that this is a part of our life, too, that it's not happy and joyful all the time."

**The Lord is near to the brokenhearted.
(Psalm 34:18)**

*May I be a help to those enduring sorrow,
Savior.*

The Magic of Christmas, Part 1

To call Megan Alexander a Christmas enthusiast would be an understatement. Anyone who follows the *Inside Edition* correspondent and Christopher Award-winning children's book author on Instagram knows her love of the holiday is boundless.

But Megan's passion for the Advent and Christmas seasons goes beyond the glitter and lights. It finds its foundation in Jesus's birth and selfless acts of giving, two elements she is keen to share in her *UP TV* series *Small Town Christmas*.

When she was a child, Megan's family would decorate every room in their house and play carols that touched her heart. In addition, she recalled on *Christopher Closeup*, "My family always made it special to go to Christmas Eve service. Oftentimes, we'd go to a late Mass or a late service and do the candlelight readings and singing of the carols, and my dad would sit us down on Christmas Eve and read the birth of Jesus."

"So, yes, I get into the decorations and the songs, but I'm also very aware that it's a celebration of the most important day for Christians, which is the birth of our Savior."

I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever. (2 Samuel 7:13)

Jesus, may I stay focused on You this season and always.

The Magic of Christmas, Part 2

Once Megan Alexander got married and became a mom, she grew excited to pass on her love of the holidays to her three children, while also teaching them the meaning behind it all. Driving around different neighborhoods to admire Christmas lights is therefore coupled with volunteering at church and buying food to give to the homeless on Christmas Eve day.

During the COVID shutdown, when everyone was staying at home, Megan reflected on a tradition from her childhood and adulthood: visiting small towns to see the unique ways they celebrated the holidays. With 20 years of media experience, she decided to develop and pitch a TV show about exactly that topic. *UP TV* responded, leading to the series *Small Town Christmas*. Each episode highlights one town's people and traditions.

Megan relishes getting to know new people, such as the man in North Pole, Alaska, who legally changed his name to Santa Claus so he could truthfully answer children's letters to old Kris Kringle. She also ensures the show highlights the spiritual aspect of the holiday season. More tomorrow...

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above. (James 1:17)

May Your gift of self, Jesus, inspire me to give of myself.

The Magic of Christmas, Part 3

As a lifelong Christian, TV host Megan Alexander makes sure her *UP TV* series *Small Town Christmas* includes the religious aspects of the holidays. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she said, “I want to produce inspiring, uplifting content. I always think, ‘Can I watch this with my kids?...Would my parents be proud of me?’ That’s a big driving force for me.

“But then it’s also, ‘How can I glorify the Lord in my work?’ In each town, as I’m looking at my rundown and all the aspects that we’re covering...I always say, ‘What’s our faith element? Are we going to a church?’”

In Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Megan interviewed the pastor at the Moravian Church about their candlelight service. And in North Pole Alaska, she visited St. Nicholas Catholic Church.

In addition, Megan’s children’s book, *The Magic of a Small Town Christmas*, was inspired by her work on the TV series. She created the fictional town of Heartbeat Falls to celebrate traditions, such as visiting a Christmas tree farm, neighbors sharing a meal, and families baking sugar cookies together.

I will glorify Your name forever. (Psalm 86:12)

Guide me in glorifying You and reflecting Your divine love, Father.

The Magic of Christmas, Part 4

Though she is not Catholic, *Small Town Christmas* host Megan Alexander embodies a spirit of ecumenism, thanks in part to the spiritual influence of her grandmother. During an interview with The Christophers, she explained:

“My grandmother was Catholic and brought us to Mass. It was important to her, and she was a big inspiration for me. She used to keep prayer books, and underline Scriptures in her Bible, and have a St. Joseph statue in her garden. It was a really important part of her life, and that sticks with you as a child.

“I appreciate the reverence that the Catholic Church has for God and for Jesus, and the respect is front and center. For me, sometimes life can get busy, and we have bells and whistles and a lot going on. Then, you walk in a Catholic church, and it’s like, ‘Okay, take a deep breath. Let’s focus on exactly what matters.’

“You see the cross at the altar, you see a crucifix, and it’s a recentering for me. So, I’m incredibly grateful to the Catholic Church and found a lot of really neat ones to put on this show, *Small Town Christmas*, that make Christmas special.”

Be still, and know that I am God! (Psalm 46:10)

Jesus, remind me to take a breath and focus on what really matters in life.

The Magic of Christmas, Part 5

One event gave TV host and *Inside Edition* correspondent Megan Alexander a special appreciation for a particular Catholic Church.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she recalled, “When Billy Graham passed away, we wanted to cover it [on *Inside Edition*]. I said to my boss, ‘It’d be really neat to do a report inside a church about his life and what he meant to the world.’

“We called all the churches around New York City, and I couldn’t get anyone to call me back except for the Catholic Church, St. Mark’s, Midtown West. They said, ‘Absolutely, come on in,’ and they welcomed me with open arms, and I did a report.

“Billy Graham, as we know, was not Catholic. But the Catholic Church said, ‘We’d love to be a part of honoring this man’s life,’ so I was pleasantly surprised by that and thought it was a neat moment.”

In [Jesus]...you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

(Ephesians 2:21,22)

May all Christians focus on what unites us, Christ Jesus.

The Magic of Christmas, Part 6

Gratitude is a hallmark of Megan Alexander's life, and she is trying to instill it in her children as well. The host of *UP TV's Small Town Christmas* and Christopher Award-winning children's book author has worked to make thankfulness a habit because she knows firsthand the difference it makes.

Megan explained, "It totally changes your mindset, changes your spirit. I drive my kids to school in the morning, and I'm constantly saying, 'What's something we're thankful for right now?'...I journal. I try to write down gratitude and thankfulness in my journal, and I try to keep it in conversation with my kids because it makes all the difference.

"That's something that my husband says to me often. If I start to get stressed out about the building of the shows for *Small Town Christmas* or getting organized with my Christmas book, he's like, 'Hey, don't forget that you're doing what you love. You get to celebrate Christmas for a job, Megan. Be grateful.' And I'm like, 'Amen. You're absolutely right.' So, my husband reminds me, 'Be grateful for what you're doing and for those small moments in life, for your family, for your friends.'"

Be thankful. (Colossians 3:15)

Help me build a habit of gratitude, Holy Spirit.

Father Holt's Sunshine File

Dominican priest Father Bill Holt, OP, keeps a “sunshine file.” It’s a box filled with thank you letters he’s received during his more than 40-year ministry.

On the *Humans of New York* social media feed, he recalled a time when he was chaplain for a children’s cancer ward, where he witnessed a lot of suffering. Father Holt noted, “You can’t explain why some things happen. Only that it’s a mystery. And a mystery is reality, imbued with God’s presence.”

One Christmas, an Irish girl dying of leukemia desperately wished for a Cabbage Patch Doll, but her mother said they were sold out everywhere. A family from Father Holt’s parish came to him that same day and asked him what he wanted for Christmas. He told them a Cabbage Patch Doll and two walkie talkies.

Father Holt said, “The Cabbage Patch Doll went to the little girl. Then I gave one walkie-talkie to her, and one to her twin brother, so they could speak while she was in isolation. After she passed away the mother wrote me a letter. I keep it in my sunshine file. It said: “Those walkie-talkies were the best medicine she ever had.””

**You will know them by their fruits.
(Matthew 7:16)**

Guide me in spreading Your light, Holy Spirit.

Silence as a Gift?

When Molly Cahill saw the movie *The Nativity Story* at age seven, she found most of it “awe-inspiring,” she writes at *AmericaMagazine.org*. One scene, however, left her scared.

When Zechariah questions the angel Gabriel about his prophecy that Elizabeth will give birth to a son, Gabriel responds, “You will be...unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words.”

Cahill found this response harsh and wondered whether God punishes people who “struggle to believe.” But in reflecting on the story as an adult, she wondered whether that silence might be a gift that would prompt Zechariah to become a better listener.

“As we anticipate the blessings of Christmas,” writes Cahill, “maybe quiet can be a gift to us, too. Maybe it will give us the opportunity to take stock of how this year has gone...to listen more attentively as we spend time with our loved ones at holiday gatherings, truly taking in what they have to say instead of just thinking of what we’ll say next. Maybe we, like Zechariah, will stop talking so we can get better at believing.”

**For God alone my soul waits in silence.
(Psalm 62:5)**

Father, allow me to truly hear what You and the people around me are saying to me.

Community Oven Bakes Christmas Cakes

Homemade Christmas cakes—the rich fruit cakes commonly gifted during the holidays in the United Kingdom—are popular staples that take hours to bake.

In Guisborough, a village in North Yorkshire, England, the community was struggling with rising energy costs and food inflation hitting a high of 12.4 percent in November 2022. Ed Hamilton-Trewhitt, owner of Brickyard Bakery, realized that his customers were struggling and offered to bake Christmas cakes in his six-foot-square oven for free.

His customers—who were barely able to heat their homes, let alone bake their Christmas cakes for hours—were grateful to Hamilton-Trewhitt for opening his bakery oven to them. “It’s a whole community coming together to support each other,” Hamilton-Trewhitt told the *Today Show*, adding, “If people need us and if people can benefit from it, then...yeah, why not?”

[They hold]...a holiday on which they send gifts of food to one another. (Esther 9:19)

Generous Lord, may I share the Christmas spirit with others and look to provide gifts to help my fellow neighbors.

To Welcome an Ailing Father

After her mother's unexpected death, Noreen Madden McInnes knew she couldn't let her ailing and grieving father in Pennsylvania spend his final months in a nursing home. She arranged for him to be driven across the country to her San Diego home, in a camper van because he was too sick to fly.

As Noreen decorated her home that Christmas, she came to see special significance in the journey of the Holy Family. Writing for *AngelusNews.com*, she observed, "As we converted our dining room into a hospital room, the prayers of family and friends became the star that guided my father to our doorstep."

"For us, the camper van became the donkey, the dining room the stable, the hospital bed [my father's] manger. His presence blessed us in ways that remain with us long after he was called home to God. We had received Christ into our home and into our hearts, in the face of the sick, the invalid, and the homeless, as all Christians are called to do...We learned in a most profound way, that it is in giving that we receive and in dying that we are born to eternal life."

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. (1 John 3:18)

Remind me, Jesus, that it is in giving that we receive.

United by a Christmas Tree

The lighting of the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree has become a major event since it began on a much smaller scale in 1931. But New York's first public Christmas tree that drew crowds was put up in 1912, writes Professor Jeffrey Kroessler in New York's *Daily News*.

The idea originated with philanthropist Emilie Herreshoff and quickly drew support from the city's businesses and wealthy residents. The chosen location was Madison Square Park, which a police officer at the time described as "the loneliest place at night in all New York." Choral groups of various nationalities volunteered to sing at the Christmas Eve tree lighting, which attracted 10,000 people.

Kroessler writes, "At 5:30, the 'Star of Bethlehem' atop the tree began to glow to the sounds of a trumpet fanfare, and the thousands of lights gradually grew in brightness as cheers rose from the crowd...As Mrs. Herreshoff had hoped, the tree brought New Yorkers together, rich and poor, immigrant and native, young and old."

I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love. (Colossians 2:2)

May the joy of the Christmas spirit unite all people, Savior.

The More the Merrier

It was just two days before Christmas in 2022, and a blizzard was raging in Buffalo, New York. Imagine 41-year-old Alexander Campagna's surprise when he opened his door to find two Korean tourists asking to borrow shovels to dig their bus out of the snow!

Knowing that shoveling would do little in this extreme situation, Alexander and his wife, Andrea, invited this tour group of 10 into their home in the ultimate gesture of holiday goodwill. The travelers hit it off with the American couple instantly, bonding over their mutual "love for Korean cuisine."

In appreciation for the Campagna's hospitality, which ended up lasting for three days and two nights, several of the tourists did most of the cooking. After the snow let up, the new friends parted on cheerful terms—but the story did not end there!

Just a month later, the Korea Tourism Organization invited Alexander and Andrea to Seoul, where they had a joyous reunion with their Korean chums. "We hope our story inspires people all around the world to be accepting of their neighbors and strangers and people in need," Alexander concluded to *The Korea Times*.

**They kindled a fire and welcomed all of us.
(Acts 28:2)**

Abba, may we be welcoming to all we meet.

A Child's Christmas Lesson, Part 1

Shortly before Christmas, Father Bob Warren of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement stopped at a diner to get a bite to eat. The place was empty, except for a man whom Father Warren described as wearing “a tattered rag of a coat, dirty worn baggy pants...knotted greasy hair, and a tired worn face.”

Soon after, a family with a toddler entered the diner and sat down to eat. It didn't take long before the gleeful child, named Eric, smiled and reached out to the shabbily dressed man. The man responded with a warm greeting of his own, saying, “Hi there, big boy. I see you.”

The child's parents felt awkward and tried to discourage Eric from interacting with the stranger. But Eric would not be deterred. His parents rushed through their meal and soon headed towards the exit. But as they passed the stranger's table, Eric bolted into his arms and gave him a hug.

In *Graymoor Today*, Father Bob wrote, “The man's eyes closed, and I saw tears rolling down his cheeks...He handed the baby back to his mother and said...‘God bless you, ma'am. Take good care of this child. He gave me my Christmas.’”

A little child shall lead them. (Isaiah 11:6)

*May I bring Christmas joy to a lonely soul,
Savior.*

A Child's Christmas Lesson, Part 2

Father Bob Warren, SA, reflected on the lesson he learned from seeing the gleeful toddler Eric rushing to embrace the seemingly-homeless man in the diner. In *Graymoor Today*, the priest wrote, “Eric is the God figure, the Christ Child filled with zeal and love for us tattered people with our tattered lives, our tattered hurts, our tattered relationships, and our tattered sins.”

“God, like little Eric, always has His arms outstretched towards us, determined to break into our lives. God, like Eric, embraces the least likely, often the ones others would like to avoid. Look at the first people called to the stable...Shepherds were considered lowly outcasts. The wise men were outsiders, pagans and not trusted. Of all the people in the world, God chose the outcasts and the foreigners to be the first to receive the astonishing news that God would become human.”

“So, what is Christ's Christmas message? Simply this: saint or sinner, He has a special place in His heart for you...Whoever we are, whatever we have done in the past—we are welcome. All of us belong at the stable.”

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you. (Romans 15:7)

Jesus, may we remember all are welcome at Your stable.

A Reporter's Christmas Poem

While working as a reporter for *WCBS 880* in New York City, Peter Haskell composed and read a Christmas poem to his audience, inspired by the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree. Its words continue to ring true. Haskell wrote:

“It might feel like spring,
but this tree sets us straight.

It's ablaze in bright lights from morning til late.

It's a symbol of hope, of joy and of peace,
A time for a breath, exhale and release.

The world can feel scary with its hate and its fear,
Makes the message of Christmas seem
all the more clear.

We need love, understanding, compassion and care.

These are the gifts we really should share.

We gaze to the future, we hope and we pray,
That our lives will get better with each passing day.

Share your heart and your spirit,
hug your lad or your lady.

At Rock Center, Peter Haskell,
WCBS Newsradio 880.”

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

May I reflect Your love and care to all this Christmas, Jesus.

Holocaust Survivors Gifted Hanukkah Meals

There are between 15,000 to 20,000 Holocaust survivors living in New York City, many who are low-income and live alone. However, the Met Council, New York's largest Kosher food network, is helping these survivors one meal at a time.

Though the Council operates throughout the year, the holiday season is special. In December 2022, volunteers gathered at a Brooklyn warehouse to pack thousands of boxes of food to be hand-delivered to Holocaust survivors for Hanukkah.

“For people who unfortunately have to be alone for the holiday, knowing people are thinking about you...is especially meaningful,” Met Council CEO David Greenfield told *CBS News*.

During the holidays, these meals come with a note that reads, “Happy Thanksgiving” or “Happy Hanukkah.” Greenfield said, “Some of the notes are coming from eight-year-old kids who are sitting there packaging and...learning that there was once something called the Holocaust, and there are people who survived, and it was terrible, and we have to give back.”

**Accept my gift that is brought to you.
(Genesis 33:11)**

God, I pray for all those who survived the Holocaust. May we always remember their courage in the face of evil.

Heart Ministry Center Offers a Fresh Start

For almost 30 years, the Heart Ministry Center has stood at the corner of 31st and Spaulding Streets in Omaha, Nebraska, as a symbol of hope and “dignity for all” who need a “fresh start” in life. The Heart Ministry first opened back in 1982, as the Sacred Heart [Parish] Human Needs Ministry, assisting families of the young students who attended the corresponding parochial school.

Today, with the generosity of prominent businesses and community leaders, it has expanded to include the Monen Healthcare Center, where doctors and Creighton University students offer vital medical services (i.e. screenings, physical therapy, mental health counseling, etc.), free of charge.

Another successful aspect of the ministry is the Fresh Start Program, which has already helped countless individuals, including its founder and current CEO, Mark Dahir. “By being part of something you believe in, over time you start believing in yourself,” Dahir, a reformed drug addict, told *The Catholic Voice*. “We strive to understand... the desperation, barriers, turmoil in people’s lives...to share that experience as equals. Through that compassion, there’s no ‘you.’ It’s a ‘we.’”

**Have unity of spirit...love for one another.
(1 Peter 3:8)**

Lord, may we strive to emulate Your endless compassion.

The Second Oldest Nun in America

Sister Francis Dominici, the second oldest nun in America, is still busy devoting her life to God. Having celebrated her 109th birthday in 2022, she was thankful to God to still be here.

“It’s nice to have a birthday, especially when you’re 109,” Sr. Francis said, as reported by *Aleteia.org*. “I’ve enjoyed my life, and I’m very grateful for the life I’ve had.”

At age two, Sr. Francis had to have her left forearm amputated. Later, as a young woman, she was determined to become a religious sister, but several orders refused to accept her due to her disability. Nevertheless, she persisted and at 18 years old, the Dominicans welcomed her. She has spent nearly 90 years in religious service, spending 52 years teaching at Molloy College in Long Island, New York.

Sr. Francis has influenced many students over the years, including Sr. Francis Daniel, who was so inspired by her teacher’s amazing faith that she followed the same religious teaching path. They are now roommates and continue to live God’s plan.

I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. (2 Timothy 1:11)

Lord, bless the nuns who devote their lives to Your work.

More than a Tip

An accident in the driveway of Kevin Keighron and Lacey Klein's home in South Carolina turned into an opportunity for thousands of people to help someone in need. It all started when Barbara Gillespie, a 72-year-old Domino's driver, fell down while delivering pizzas to the family.

"I open the door and there she is just laying on the ground trying to get up," Kevin told *Good Morning America*. "She was more worried about [the food] than anything else. And I was like, 'I don't care about the food. I care about you.'"

The family set up a *GoFundMe* to leave an extra "tip" for Gillespie, who has worked for Domino's for five and a half years. Over \$250,000 went on to be donated to the campaign. "We thought we would get her a bigger tip and bring it to her. We never expected to get as much as we did," said Lacey.

"I almost gave up on people because so many people out there today are so mean," Gillespie said, in awe of the amount raised from strangers. "And here we got...loving, caring people. They care about someone else...about an elderly woman."

Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land. (Deuteronomy 15:11)

Help me be a friend to someone in need, Abba.

Open Your Eyes and Be Grateful

It's a sad truth that many of us don't realize what we have until we lose it. But Father Luigi Maria Epicoco believes that it shouldn't be that way. Writing at *Aleteia*, he explained: "Our real problem is that when we regularly experience a good thing, we become so accustomed to it that we consider it a right.

"People who are in good health don't appreciate it until they get sick. People who have food every day don't notice the importance of food until they're hungry. People who live in a country where there are no wars don't attach any importance to that peace until something happens that throws them into the opposite situation.

"The question is, why do we have to wait until we've a bad experience in order to take seriously the good things that are present in our lives? Having a life of faith means not waiting for a tragedy to decide to be better people. Having faith means not seeing God, but seeing all the good that He puts into our lives in a hidden way, and living with a life-changing gratitude that makes us better people."

**Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving.
(Psalm 95:2)**

Remind me to appreciate the blessings in my life, Father.

Memorable Sermon Still Guides Actress

Many of us carry a lot of baggage around with us. Not the physical kind, but old resentments, fears, or disappointments that drag us down, sapping our joy. Wouldn't it be great to let those burdens go? Well, actress and humanitarian Jennifer Garner has an idea to help you do just that.

During an interview with *Allure* magazine, she recalled a sermon that she and her family heard in their church when she was a child: "Our minister talked about taking something hard that had happened and imagining yourself going down to the banks of the river, and fashioning a beautiful box out of what you find there, and placing this hurt carefully in the box, and watching it float down the river. The power of letting go. Don't carry it. Just let it go."

Garner concluded, "So many times, my sisters and I have said, 'You need to put that in the river.'"

As the new year approaches, consider putting old hurts in a metaphorical box and sending them down the river. It's the perfect time for a fresh start full of hope and promise.

Cast all your anxiety on Him. (1 Peter 5:7)

Prince of Peace, I am putting my troubles "in the river" and leaving them to You.