

The Longest Night
A Gathering on the Winter Solstice



Sunday, December 22, 2019
7:00 pm

Orchard Valley United Church
130 Cornwallis Ave, New Minas NS
(902) 681-0366

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130 Cornwallis Ave., New Minas, NS B4N 3M7

ORDER OF WORSHIP
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Welcome

*** Call to Worship:**

All around us we see the lights of Christmas, we hear the sounds of joyful celebration. We come to this service recognizing that this season is often difficult for many and may not be as joyful for us as it seems to be for many others.

As the nights have grown longer, sadness and emptiness, loneliness and pain wrap around the hearts of many of us. In this season of longest nights, some struggle to put into words that which causes them to feel blue rather than joyful. For some, a loved one has died. For others, a friend has moved away.

Still others have lost a job, a cherished dream, or a sense of hope. We might be feeling worried, trapped, insecure, adrift, or alone. We may be grieving what might have been but will not be, or grieving over what used to be but cannot be anymore. We may simply be in need of a place of quiet and calm in an otherwise busy season.

Whatever may have brought us here we offer it all to the One born in Bethlehem's stable, knowing that there is no pain that does not echo in God's heart, no joy that does not come from God's hand.

Hymn: "Don't Be Afraid" MV #90 (2x)

Prayer of Approach:

One: We gather this night, to remember...
those who have touched our lives,
glad memories and happy stories,
and love that we hold dear.

All: We name those who have been life itself to us.

One: We gather in the name of Jesus,
vulnerable as an infant,
joyful and happy as a youth,
wise and caring as an adult.

**All: We gather in the presence of God,
who brings life and light to all.**

One: All life is precious in God's sight.

All: No one is ever alone or forgotten.

One: Come, let us gather in the Spirit of hope and peace.

All: We worship, in the name of joy and love. Amen.

Hymn: "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" VU #44
vs. 1,2,4

Lighting of Candles and Reflection

Naming our Loss:

While we may have moments where we can join others in
the hope, peace and joy of this season, we still know and
acknowledge that there is something missing in our lives, in
our homes, and in our hearts.

We name our losses before God,
the loss of a partner in life,
the loss of a well-loved family member,
the loss of a friend,
the loss of a loved one,
the loss of a pet,

the loss of health,
the loss of a cherished dream,
the loss of self-confidence.

We have this safe space here, tonight, where we can be
okay with how we are feeling. We don't have any
obligation to be angry or happy, joyous or sad. We name
our own particular losses in silence before God: moments
of memory, the good ones and the hard ones, and reflect on
the feelings that have been ours in loss. We pause in the
silence and stillness of this time and place, and remember
and reflect...

Hymn: "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" VU #400
(2x)

Ceremony of Commemoration:

We light a candle in memory of those who gave us birth,
who nurtured us, offered love, and cherished us.

We remember mothers and fathers, guardians and
grandparents, and all our family through the ages.

We light a candle in memory of those who have been joined
to us in the great circle of family.

We remember sisters and brothers, aunts, uncles, and
cousins, those near to us and far away.

We light a candle in memory of those who have left us
before we expected, those we hold dear, and with whom we
still walk in our dreams.

We remember children and grandchildren, those who
leaped within the womb and who danced upon the
earth.

We light a candle in memory of those whom we came to
know through the eyes of love. We hold sacred the faces
and memories of years past, of those who brightened our
days and lit up our lives.

We remember husbands and wives, dearest loves and closest friends, who changed our lives forever.

We light a candle in memory of those who shared in our lives in many ways, who worked with us and made our lives more enjoyable.

We remember friends and neighbours.

We light a candle for those we do not know, O God, who, like us, have suffered loss, who live with grief, who long for peace and justice, who long for friendship and healing.

We remember your people, of every time and place.

Finally, we leave one candle unlit, mindful of the great truth of this life, that in the fullness of time we, too, will join our loved ones in a realm without sorrow and pain, in the company of Unending Love.

For these and all your children, we give thanks for life, hope and courage. Amen.

Hymn: "Long Before the Night" VU #282
vs. 1&5

Listening for God's Promise

Losing One We Love:

Reading: Isaiah 40:1, 6-8

Prayer:

Holy One, you are with us in times of trouble and in times of peace; in times of sorrow and times of joy. When we are unsure of how to continue living and loving, your Spirit intervenes with sighs too deep for words. Speak for us now, Loving God. Comfort us with your abiding peace... *(silence)*

Verse: Those Hearts That VU #494,
We Have Treasured v. 1

Healing and Memory:

Reading: Psalm 139:7-12

Prayer:

God of all, when we feel alone, you draw nearer; when we lose our footing, you guide us toward a good path. Through the ages, you have promised to be a comfort to your people, and you call us to be a comfort to others. In all our living, may we never lose the memory of our most cherished relationships, and may we feel the courage and strength you offer to us through those who surround us... *(silence)*

Verse: Those Hearts That VU #494,
We Have Treasured v. 2

Living with Hope and Love:

Reading: John 14:1-4, 18-19

Prayer:

God of hope and joy, you prepare our hearts for renewal. You till the soil of our lives and nurture small shoots of possibility. Even when we are unsure, you repeat your promise: I will never leave you. Open us, Holy One, to your promise. Hold us in your care. Strengthen us for your future. Guide us in anticipation and faith... *(silence)*

Verse: Those Hearts That VU #494,
We Have Treasured v. 3

Lighting of Memorial Candles:

One: You are invited to light a candle, place it on the tray,
and if you wish, say: "I light this candle for (name/s
optional), a person who was a light to my life." or
"I light this candle for (details optional), a burden that
is a heavy yoke for me."

**All: In your pain we are with you.
In your pain God is with you.**

Hymn: "Lead Me, God" VU p.728
(Refrain 2, 2x)

Prayer:

One: Out of the depths we cry to you, O God:
we come in pain,
we come in sorrow,
we come in brokenness,
we come in sadness,
we come in the loneliness.

You hear our cries, O God, you know our pain;
hold us in your tender love.

**All: God of hope, give us this night a glimpse of trust
and assurance, a sense of purpose and possibility.
Come into our hearts and our minds, bringing
comfort, health, and peace. Re-create in us a sense
of thanksgiving, in the joy of your love. Amen.**

Hymn: "As the Deer Pants for Water" VU p.766

Blessing and Sending Forth:

We return to the world from which we came: a world of
pain, a world of promise; the world which God so loved that
the Bethlehem baby was born. May we listen to the voice of
the angel who says, "Fear not." May we be filled with the
Good News of God, through the child of Mary and Joseph,
God's gift of new life for all. Amen.



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