TÕETERA / THE SOWER - DECEMBER 2026

ST. PETER'S ESTONIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF TORONTO

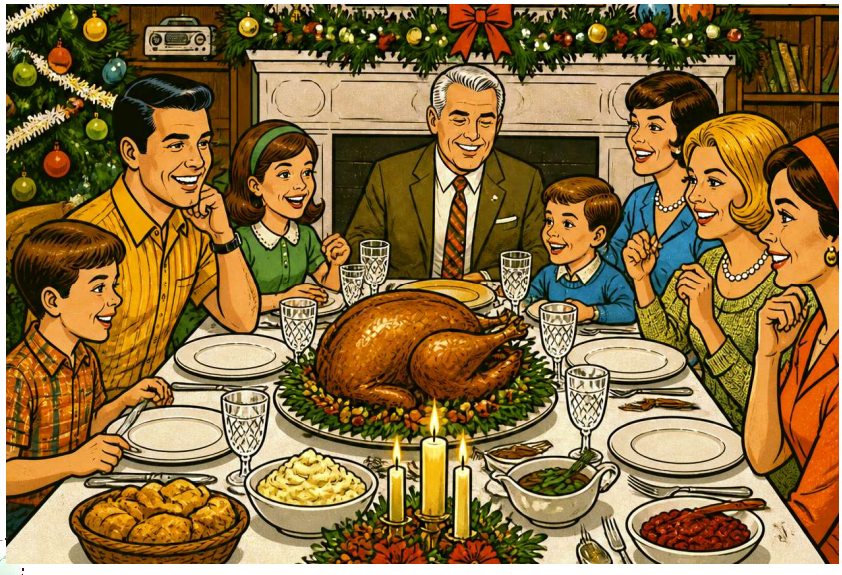
EELK Toronto Peetri Kogudus

Why Christmas Can Be the Hardest Time of the Year

There is a classic Christmas song, made famous by Andy Williams, called "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year". (It's the most wonderful time of the year / With the kids jingle belling / And everyone telling you be of good cheer / It's the hap-happiest season of all .)

From a biblical perspective, Christmas is indeed a time of profound joy, for it celebrates the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We celebrate the coming of the One who brought hope to a broken world and promised us the gift of eternal life. What could be more precious than that? Yet there is a difference between celebrating the true meaning of Christmas and experiencing the holiday season as it is often portrayed in our culture. While the birth of Christ is a reason for rejoicing, the outward celebration of Christmas can be anything but joyful for many people.

Did you know that a survey of Canadians found that December was the most stressful month of the year? Not everyone is happy during Christmas. While cultural messages portray the holiday as a universal time of joy and togetherness, mental health data shows that it is frequently one of the most stressful, lonely, overwhelming, and difficult times of the year. Add to this our own high expectations for the holidays, and those thrust upon us. There is the stress of dealing with forced happiness, family members, missing loved ones, sick or dying relatives, and financial hardships. Society creates a strong pressure to feel festive, grateful and merry on cue.



We all have that Norman Rockwell image in our minds with happy families sitting round the dining room table; father carving the turkey, mother passing side dishes, happy smiling children, round a brightly decorated tree, surrounded by gifts, but is that doable? Should it be? If our reality does not

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Kolmapäeval/Wed. 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Neljapäeval/Thurs. 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

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match this idealized “perfect” Christmas seen in the media, it often triggers feelings of guilt, failure, or isolation.

We also need to consider financial and economic pressure including the cost of travel, hosting, and buying gifts creating severe money worries and debt. The holidays also magnify the absence of loved ones due to death, divorce, estrangement, illness. Celebrating a "first Christmas without someone" or facing empty seats at the table makes loss feel much sharper. What about the stress of celebrating the season knowing that death for a family member is imminent and this will be your last Christmas together.

Difficult family dynamics of being forced into close quarters with relatives you rarely see—or dealing with past family trauma, addiction, or argument-prone environments—can turn a supposed celebration into a trigger.

While some people are overwhelmed by crowds, others feel profoundly isolated because friends are busy, university or work relocations keep them apart, or community services and local routines shut down.

We need to also consider Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). The holidays arrive just as winter begins with shorter daylight hours, less sunlight, reduced outdoor physical activity, and looming long cold months ahead, all of which contribute to low energy and dips in mood. When we consider all these circumstances, it becomes clear that Christmas is not universally merry. For some, it is a season to celebrate. For others, it is a season to endure.

Christmas church services offer upbeat messages, as they should, about the coming of Jesus. However, some Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist congregations offer a “Blue Christmas” service typically held on or around Dec. 21st at the Winter Solstice. The service features quiet hymns, candle lighting, prayer, and space to acknowledge pain rather than forced holiday cheer. Unlike traditional Christmas services, these gatherings make space for people who are grieving, struggling with depression, living with illness, facing difficult circumstances, or simply finding the season hard to bear. People come together to comfort and support each other.

How Can we Help Each Other During the Christmas Season?

Helping someone who feels sad, lonely, or overwhelmed during Christmas requires empathy, patience, and a practical approach that takes the pressure off them.



- We need to listen and acknowledge their feelings. Let them know it is completely normal to feel sad, stressed, or out of place during the holidays. Avoid forcing them to "cheer up" or shaming them for not matching the festive energy.
- Use non-confrontational communication: Ask open-ended questions like, "How are you really holding up with everything right now?"
- Avoid trying to "fix" it: You do not need to solve their grief, loneliness, or family conflict. Simply sitting with them and listening makes a massive difference.
- Reduce expectations: Give them permission to skip parties, drop traditions, or keep things low-key without guilt.
- Lessen the workload: Help out with cooking, cleaning, wrapping gifts, or running errands so they are not carrying the whole burden alone.
- Offer low-key togetherness: Instead of a loud, crowded party, suggest a quiet walk, watching a favorite movie at home, or having a simple cup of tea.
- It’s difficult watching someone you love approach end-of-life, especially during a time that is typically reserved to be filled with holiday cheer. But it is still important, knowing it may be your last together, to both cherish this moment and make it special.
- When trying to cope with anticipatory grief, it’s easy to shut down both mentally and verbally. It’s understandable. But in a time meant for spreading joy and appreciation, it’s also important to remember to communicate. Share your love and appreciation and thankfulness for their presence and their impact on your life. Reflect. Share stories. Make it known to each other how thankful you are to share this time together.
- Honour lost loved ones: If their sadness stems from grief, encourage talking about the person who passed, looking at photos, or cooking a favorite dish in their memory.

There is an Estonian custom of setting an extra place at the table for departed loved ones. Do so in their honour.

- To avoid the Christmas blues, manage your expectations, set firm boundaries, and prioritize physical and emotional self-care.

Practical Strategies to Cope

- Adjust your expectations: Realize that holidays do not need to look like a movie. Let go of the pressure to create a "perfect" experience or please everyone.
- Set firm boundaries: Say no to events, commitments, or social obligations that drain your energy rather than bring you joy.
- Stay within a budget: Financial stress is a major trigger for holiday sadness. Focus on low-cost or free activities—like looking at holiday lights or calling a loved one—instead of overspending on gifts.
- Maintain healthy routines: Limit alcohol and heavy comfort foods, which can cause energy crashes or amplify low moods. Try to get enough sleep, eat well, and go for a daily walk or light exercise.
- Connect with others (or volunteer): If you feel isolated, reach out to a friend with a quick text or phone call. Shifting your focus to help others through local volunteering can also provide a sense of purpose.
- Acknowledge your feelings: Name your emotions without judgment rather than forcing fake cheer. Journaling or allowing yourself to process grief and stress can help you heal.



A Christmas Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, though Christmas is sometimes hard because we miss the ones we love, help me remember the gift You gave - Your Son, Jesus, a baby born to die. Thank You for this gift of love, and help me receive it. In times of grief and sadness, remind me of the reason and fill me with Your Peace.

Although we have many reasons to rejoice today, Lord, we also know December 25th can be not-so-merry for a whole host of reasons. We pray for those who are experiencing loss this Christmas: relational, financial, spiritual and physical.

We pray for those dealing with unemployment and addictions and chronic sickness ... and unending pain and frustrations of all kinds. Thank You, Lord, that You are The Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace, even in the midst of our not-so-merry circumstances.

I ask You for the power to press on, and Everlasting Father, I thank You for carrying me when it's hard to walk.

This life is hard, sometimes unbearable. The loss of a loved one who fought the fight against cancer so valiantly. The unwanted divorce that left us wondering if anything in our lives had been real. The pain of infertility that leaves us devastated every single month. The hurt of watching a child walk away from the truth of God's word.

Lord, we ask You to grant us peace. Peace in our homes, peace in our churches, and peace in our hearts, when the world all around us spins out-of-control. Help us to stay focused on You, this Christmastime and always.

We ask for Your grace and guidance. Lord, teach us how to lean on one another, to offer a listening ear, a caring heart, and a helping hand when times are hard.

Soften our hearts so that we are ready and available to serve each other—even when it is inconvenient or difficult. Remove pride, self-centeredness, and division from our midst, and replace them with patience, gentleness, and unfailing love.

Help us to carry each other's burdens, to celebrate one another's joys, and to build a community where no one feels alone. May our words uplift and our actions encourage.

May the true meaning of Christmas fill our hearts with gratitude, sustain us through our hardest days, and remind us that even in the midst of sadness, the light of Christ continues to shine.

Amen

Inglid on olemas, ent mõnikord pole neil tiibu ja me kutsume neid sõpradeks.

NEWS / UUDISED

All Souls' Day (Hingedepäev) was observed on November 1 at St. Peter's Church. This meaningful day offers us an opportunity to pause, remember, and reflect on the special bonds we share with our ancestors, departed loved ones, and generations past and present. We hold close in our hearts those who are no longer with us but whose memories remain with us always. The beautiful altar flowers were provided by Margit Viia-Maiste in loving memory of her husband, Armas.



The service was led by Deacon Karl Paju, with Erik Kreem accompanying on the organ. The lovely music was provided by the trio "Songbirds" (Laululinnud), and Scripture readings were shared by Mary Ots-Donaldson and Tiina Jenkins.







As part of the service, memorial candles were lit by Anne Liis Keelmann in honour and remembrance of loved ones who have passed. Following the service, everyone gathered in the Guild Room for coffee, refreshments, and fellowship.

Photographs: Thomas Arget, Wayne Donaldson, and Anne Liis Keelmann.



Guild members preparing donated items for silent auction and raffle at the Christmas Craft Show and Café.

St. Peter's Christmas Craft Market & Café Drew a Crowd- St. Peter's Church was filled with festive spirit on November 14 as visitors gathered for its annual Christmas Craft Market and Café. The event was a great success, attracting a large number of shoppers and community members who came out to enjoy an afternoon of shopping, food, entertainment and fellowship.







The craft market offered visitors an opportunity to browse a wonderful selection of handmade items, gifts and seasonal treasures. Tables overflowed with beautifully knitted hats and children's wear, children's toys and books, slime jars, jewellery, handmade wooden cutting and charcuterie boards, magnets, ornaments, creams, soaps, baskets, chocolates, gingerbread cookies, and marinated pumpkin. Vendors enjoyed a successful day, with plenty of interest from shoppers looking for unique Christmas gifts and special finds.

Adding to the festive atmosphere was entertainment by singer Taivi, whose performance on piano and mandolin provided enjoyable music for guests as they browsed, shopped and relaxed throughout the day.

The Honourable Robert Oliphant, Liberal Member of Parliament for Don Valley West, dropped by and congratulated the church on its recent Heritage Designation.









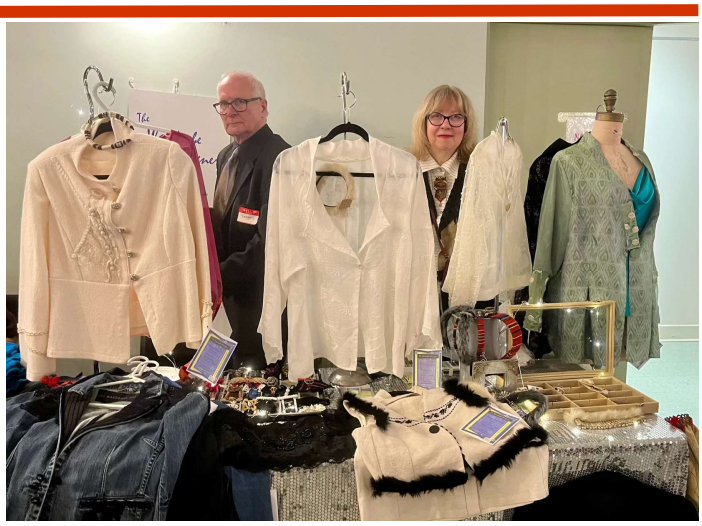




The popular bake sale was another highlight, featuring an assortment of delicious homemade goodies to tempt visitors. From sweet treats to baked favourites, there was something for everyone to enjoy or take home. The pirukad were especially popular! The church café also kept visitors well fed, serving up hot dogs and sausages that proved to be a welcome lunchtime treat.







Many people chose to spend a good part of their day at the event, taking their time to visit the various tables, enjoy the refreshments, listen to the entertainment and catch up with friends and neighbours.

The silent auction was also a success, attracting considerable interest and enthusiastic bidding. Lottery ticket sales were brisk as visitors tried their luck and supported the fundraising efforts.

With busy vendor tables, delicious food, lively entertainment and enthusiastic community participation, the Christmas Craft Market and Café was a wonderful day for St. Peter's Church. The strong turnout and support from the community helped make the November 14 event a memorable and a festive way to begin the Christmas season.

A huge thank you to the donors, volunteers, guest musician, vendors and shoppers who made this year's Craft Market and Café a great success!

Photos by Thomas Arget, Nick Chorowiec, Anne Liis Keelmann, Srishtie Keelmann and Tiiu Roiser



A Brother Like That - *Author Unknown*

A friend of mine named Paul received a new car from his brother as a pre-Christmas present. On Christmas Eve, when Paul came out of his office, a street urchin was walking around the shiny new car, admiring it. “Is this your car, mister?” he asked.

Paul nodded. “My brother gave it to me for Christmas.”

The boy looked astounded. “You mean your brother gave it to you, and it didn’t cost you anything? Gosh, I wish…..”

He hesitated, and Paul knew what he was going to wish. He was going to wish he had a brother like that. But what the lad said jarred Paul all the way down to his heels.

“I wish,” the boy went on, “that I could be a brother like that.”

Paul looked at the boy in astonishment, then impulsively added, “Would you like a ride in my new car?”

“Oh, yes, I’d love that!” After a short ride the urchin turned, and with his eyes aglow said, “Mister, would you mind driving in front of my house?”

Paul smiled a little. He thought he knew what the lad wanted. He wanted to show his neighbors that he could ride home in a big automobile. But Paul was wrong again.

“Will you stop right where those steps are?” the boy asked. He ran up the steps. Then in a little while, Paul heard him coming back, but he was not coming fast. He was carrying his little crippled brother. He sat down on the bottom step, then sort of squeezed up right against him and pointed to the car.

“There she is, Buddy, just like I told you upstairs. His brother gave it to him for Christmas and it didn’t cost him a cent, and someday I’m gonna give you one just like it; then you can see for yourself all the pretty Christmas lights and windows that I’ve been trying to tell you about.”

Paul got out and lifted the little lad into the front seat of his car. The shining-eyed older brother climbed in beside him and the three of them began a memorable holiday ride.

That Christmas Eve, Paul learned what Jesus meant when He said, ”It is more blessed to give…..”



Jõuluvana



Jõulumees, jõulumees tead sa ka?
Sulle ma kirja just kirjutan.
Paber ja ümbrik on ammu mu ees.
Mis peaksin küll tellima jõulumees?

Autod mul on juba, traktor ka.
Raamatuid, pliiatseid kuhjaga.
Suusad on kuuris ja kelk trepi ees,
mis eelmisel aastal tõid jõulumees.



Hamstrit ma sooviksin, koera ka.
Kassiga tahaksin mängida.
Jõulumees kallis sa seda tead juba,
et ema mul loomi küll tuua ei luba.

Jõulumees, jõulumees tead kuidas tee?
Kingi üks kutsikas emale.
Isale kingi sa kutsika maja
ja minule polegi kingitust vaja!

CHURCH SERVICES & EVENTS / JUMALA-TEENISTUSED & ÜRITUSED*

Dec. 24 Thursday - 12:00 noon - Christmas Eve English service with Rev. Ando Kass and Deacon Karl Paju, organist Erik Kreem, soloist Heidi Breier.

Dec. 24 Thursday - 2:00 p.m. - Christmas Eve Estonian service with Bishop Ove Sander, Rev. Ando Kass and Deacon Karl Paju, organist Erik Kreem, soloist Heidi Breier.

Dec. 27 Sunday - 3:00 p.m. Estonian Service at Ehatare with Deacon Karl Paju.

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2027 !

*** New events may be added to the calendar—please check our church website for any additions: www.stpeterstorontoestonianchurch.ca/event-calendar**

Kõige ilusam kuusepuu linna ei tule
tema koduks on vaikne ja lumine laas,
õhtu süütab ta okste peal tähtede tuled,
ingli juustena lumised vaibad on maas.

Church Office Hours:

Tues. 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Wed. 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Thurs. 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Deacon Karl Paju's Office Hours:

Thursdays from
12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m.

To request prayers, please contact St. Peter's office.

Eestpalved võib igal ajal kirjalikult esitada kiriku kontorisse: stpeterstoronto@rogers.com

If you have not already done so, please ensure that the church has your up-to-date contact information.

Kui teie ei ole juba teinud, palun saatke oma kehtivad andmed (postiaadress, epost, ja telefoninumber) kiriku kantseleisse: 416-483-5847.

Rõõmsaid ja õnnistatud jõulupühi,
kaunist aastavahetust ja head uut aastat!

Soovivad EELK Toronto Peetri Koguduse juhatus
ja teenistujad.

Blessings for Christmas and a Happy New Year!

From St. Peter's Congregational Council and employees.

