

“Be compassionate, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.”
Ian MacLaren, Scottish author and theologian (d. 1907)

Dear Friends,

Thanksgiving meals are now over, and while this may be one of the coldest Thanksgivings on record, even now our hearts are beginning to warm as we enter the Season of Advent and look expectantly towards the celebration of our Lord’s birth.

I love this time of year. When the days are descending into that blustery cold and the nights are getting darker and longer, I need that beacon of Christmas light to enliven my spirit and keep me going. I even find myself looking at the people I come across in a different way. We are all out there getting ready... for holiday parties, for visiting with relatives, searching for those “just right” gifts and baking delectable goodies. But when I gaze a little longer, there are signs that there are many people who are also struggling through this season of their lives.

“Be compassionate” Ian MacLaren reminds us, ***“for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.”*** I think of all the travelers who passed by Mary and Joseph as they made their way to Bethlehem those many years ago. Did they notice signs of a battle on that holy couple’s faces? Did they know what it was those two were up against? We know that we are called to show compassion. But we are called to far more than acts of kindness. We are called to *notice*. To pause long enough to notice what is really going on in another’s life. It is all well and good to donate a toy or to drop off a Christmas ham. But to go a little deeper, to ask the question *“how are you doing?”* (and really mean it!) takes us to the place of deep compassion and deep connection, the kind of compassion and connection that God in Christ made when he chose to be born into our world.

I do so love this time of year! It is a time when the people of Christ Church especially demonstrate their generosity. There are many ways we work as a faith community to impact our wider community: we bring toys and games for our Annual Toy Drive which benefits the children of the Keansburg area (please bring unwrapped toys to church by December 9th for Saint Nicolas’ visitation). We collect gift cards for the young adults of Covenant House in Asbury Park and Newark (gift cards from Target, Marshalls, Shoprite or Walmart are very much appreciated, or a simple VISA card. \$25 or \$50 cards are especially good for the staff who will be purchasing gifts for individuals). Very soon our traditional “Mitten Tree” will be stationed in the nave of the church and a variety of hats, scarves, mitten and gloves will be hung there with care. A box to collect used coats can be found in the Parish House. All for those who will need warm clothing this winter.

Every single one of these gifts of love is so deeply appreciated and I pray each household will be quick to remember to give beyond their own family’s needs. But mostly, I pray that we all become more aware and responsive to the deeper needs of our community. There are indeed those who are fighting mighty battles. There are youth separated from and missing their families. Families who don’t know if they have enough income this week to put food on the table. There are those dealing with debilitating health issues. And those who are facing the holidays for the first time after the loss of beloved relative. Be sure you see and acknowledge these deeper needs and you will help them win their battles. The holidays can be a difficult time – but we can make a difference.

Peace,
Mother Lisa+