

November 25, 2019 Huntley UMC weekly email

Dear friends,

Next Sunday marks the beginning of the new church year. On Sunday, December 1st, we will celebrate the beginning of the Advent season, as we begin to prepare for Christmas and the celebration of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Over the next four weeks, we will hear of the promised coming of the Messiah. We will have special worship services, enjoy special music of the season, decorate our churches and homes, attend parties and special events, gather together with family and friends, give and receive season's greetings, cards, and gifts. It is a most special time of year for many people, but certainly not for all people.

While many of us love this time of year, too many people sense a rising feeling of despair at the approaching Holiday season. The Holiday season is difficult for those people who are hurting because of depression, difficult life situations, addictions, loneliness, or grief over missing loved ones who have died. Last year at Huntley United Methodist Church, we offered a Blue Christmas worship service during Advent as a way of acknowledging those who were sad or struggling with loss. It was well received because many of us have more of those sad feelings than we would like to admit. Feelings of loss are with most of us, even as we are able to deal appropriately with our sadness and loss. But, unfortunately, some people come to a crisis point in their lives when the sadness and losses in life overwhelm them.

Suicide is a subject that many people do not want to acknowledge or talk about, but suicide is a persistent problem in Montana. Montana ranks at the top or near the top in suicides in the United States over the last few decades. We have all been touched by the trauma of suicide either in our own families, or in the family of someone we know. In towns and cities all over Montana, both small and large, mourners have gathered to grieve the loss of another life due to suicide.

The reasons for the high rate of suicide in Montana are many and varied. We live in a sparsely populated state, yet which is large by area. Many people live in rural places, or are isolated in other ways. Our state provides far less mental-health services than are needed for our residents. A strong gun culture and a high rate of alcohol and drug use compound the problem, as does the lack of sunlight in winter and high altitude, which both raise the risk of depression. And we Montanans are a proud and independent group of folks who often view acknowledging and reaching out for help as a sign of weakness. This creates a perfect storm for the curse of suicide in our state.

So, Montana has a problem, but we all can be part of the solution. While there are no easy answers, there are steps each of us can do to lessen the tragic effects of suicides in our communities. One very concrete step we can do is attend Suicide Prevention Training. Huntley United Methodist Church will host this training on Wednesday, December 4th at 7:00 p.m. as a service to our community. The Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone County and RiverStone Health offer this QPR training at no cost to participants.

QPR stands for Question, Persuade, Refer and is a nationally recognized form of suicide prevention training. Just as people trained in CPR help save thousands of lives each year, people trained in QPR learn how to recognize the warning signs of a potential suicide crisis, how to engage with the person, and what to do. Anyone can benefit from being QPR trained and helping those around them. This training is ideal for coaches, teachers, pastors, and others who interact with people on a regular basis.

Please join us at Huntley United Methodist Church on Wednesday, December 4th at 7:00 p.m. for this community training opportunity. During this season of joy and hope, let us all commit to doing our part to bring joy and hope to those who are burdened by sadness and loss.

Companions in Christ group Advent study will meet on Monday, November 25th at 7:00 p.m. Join us for a light dinner then our lesson.

Huntley United Methodist Women will host a Soup Luncheon and Bake Sale on Sunday, December 1st beginning at 11:30 a.m.

Pastor Gary Geiman
Huntley United Methodist Church