

To Protect

**Office of Victim Assistance
& Safe Environment
Archdiocese of San
Antonio**



Special points of interest:

Audits

New Year, New
Commitment

What Grieving People Wish
You Knew at Christmas

In this issue:

Audits 1

New Year, New
Commitment 2

Holiday Events in San
Antonio 2

What Grieving
People Wish You
Knew at Christmas 3

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We are extremely proud of all the hard work and dedication in ensuring all Archdiocesan trainings are completed; we would now like to focus on maintaining compliance.

Beginning *January of 2020*, the Office of Victim Assistance and Safe Environment will begin conducting *monthly audits of Parish offices*. We will be looking for Employee & Volunteer compliance with trainings and background checks.

Storie Arredondo, OVASE Associate Director, will contact the Parish to schedule the audits. A list of all Employees and Volunteers by Ministry and access to wifi is all that is needed. We will be auditing 2 to 3 Parishes a month.

Should you have any questions, please contact the OVASE office.

Thank you so much for your cooperation!

A New Year, A New Commitment

With 2020 approaching, we look back on 2019 and recognize that being a Safe Environment Coordinator is a huge job! Many of you are not full time employees, only part time volunteers. We do recognize that we all have a full plate. We just ask for everyone to take the time during the New Year to re-evaluate their own lives. Ask yourself the following questions: Am I committed to the mission of this Ministry? Do I have the personal and emotional energy that it will require? Do I have the passion to help others? Praise God if you answered YES! We ask that you pray for our Ministry's continued support and strengthen your commitment in 2020. If you answered NO, to any of the questions, then we ask that you pray for guidance. The Lord will help you make the decision if this is the Ministry for you. You can even call our office and we will offer guidance. We ask those who are in this Ministry to "re-commit" to the mission of protecting children as we start a new year.

Our office will support each and every one of you in 2020 in any way possible. We will continue to be available by phone, email, or by personal visits. Whatever your needs are, we will do our best to meet them. That is our commitment to you this New Year!



Holiday Events in San Antonio

Whataburger Zoo Lights : Thru 12/31— Merry and Bright and a WILD night. Christmas time activities include a choreographed light show, s'mores, ice skating, camel rides, and of course, Santa!

Rotary Ice Rink: Thru 1/31—The Rotary Club of San Antonio present 2019 Holiday Outdoor Ice Rink located in Travis Park.

Holiday Lights on the Riverwalk: Thru 1/13—Famous Holiday lights on the Riverwalk, over 100,000 lights draped over the towering bald Cypress Trees that line the Riverwalk.

FORD Fiesta De Las Luminarias: Thru 12/21—Experience the Holiday serenity of the Riverwalk as you stroll along the lush banks of the San Antonio River guided by more than 2,000 luminarias.

Holiday in the Park: Thru 1/5—Six Flags Fiesta Texas is transformed into a Winter Wonderland with millions of colorful twinkling lights throughout the park with meet and greets with Santa and his helpers!

Seaworld San Antonio's Christmas Celebration: Thru 1/5— Included with park admission; Seaworld's Christmas Celebration is back with Santa, Sea Lions, over 9 million shimmering lights, and so much more!

What Grieving People Wish You Knew at Christmas

By: Nancy Guthrie

“Happy Thanksgiving!” “Merry Christmas!” “Happy New Year!” As the end of the year approaches, everywhere we turn someone is telling us we should be happy.

But for those who’ve recently lost someone they love, the holidays can seem more like something to survive than to enjoy. The traditions and events that can add so much joy and meaning to the season are punctuated with painful reminders of the person we love who is not here to share in it. Many have wished they could find a quiet place to hide until January 2.



While those of us who surround grieving people can’t fix the pain of loss, we can bring comfort as we come alongside those who hurt with special sensitivity to what grief is like during the holidays. Grieving people wish we all knew at least five truths, among other, at Christmas.

1. **Even the best times are punctured with an awareness that someone is missing.** I remember a conversation I had with a friend as we prepared to head out on a holiday trip shortly after our daughter, Hope, died. “That should be fun!” she said. I sensed I was supposed to agree wholeheartedly with her. What I didn’t know how to explain is that when you’ve lost a member of your family, even the best of times are painfully incomplete. Someone is missing. Even the best days and happiest events are tinged with sadness. Wherever you go, the sadness goes with you.



2. **Social Situations are hard.** I have never been able to figure out why crowds are difficult when you’re grieving, but they are. Small talk can be unbearable when something so significant has happened. Meeting new people will likely bring questions about family. To walk alone into a room full of couples

when your spouse has died, or into an event filled with children when your child has died, can be a soul-crushing reminder of what you have lost. If you’ve invited someone in the midst of grief to your holiday event, let them know that you understand if it seems too hard at the last minute and they have to cancel, or that they may only be able to stay for a short time. If you’re going to an event, give a grieving person a call and ask if you can pick her up and stick with her throughout the event for support. When you come upon a grieving person at a holiday social event, let him know that you are still thinking about the person he loves who has died, and invite him to talk about his memories with that person. Don’t be afraid to say the name of the person who has died. It will be a balm to the grieving person’s soul.

3. **Extended family can be awkward and uneasy.** Grief is often awkward—even, and perhaps especially, with those to whom we’re closest. My husband and I host weekend retreats for couples that have lost children, and the difficulty of being with family at the holidays is often a topic of conversation among these couples. They know that some family members think they’ve grieved long enough and want them



What Grieving People Wish You Knew at Christmas

(continued) to move on. Others want to initiate a conversation about the person who died but aren't sure how. What often happens is that the name of the person who died is never mentioned, and it feels to the person who is grieving that they have been erased from the family. Do you know a grieving person heading to a family gathering for the holidays? You might ask about their expectations when they're with family. And if they have a strong desire for their loved one to be remembered in a certain way, combined with a fear that it may not happen, you might encourage and help them to write a letter to their family in advance stating clearly what would bring comfort, rather than expect that their family will instinctively know.



4. Tears are not a problem. For most of us, grief tends to work itself out in tears—tears that come out at times we don't expect. Sometimes grieving people sense that people around them see their tears as a problem to be solved—that tears must mean they aren't doing very well with their grief. But it makes sense that the great sorrow of losing someone we love would come out in tears. Tears are not the enemy. Tears do not reflect a lack of faith. Tears are a gift from God that help to

wash away the deep pain of loss. It is a great gift to let grieving people know that they don't have to be embarrassed by their tears around you—that they are welcome to cry with you. An even greater gift is to shed tears of your own over the loss of the person they love. Your tears reflect the worth of the person who died and assure them that they are not alone in missing that person.

5. It can be hard to remember why Christmas should be so merry. In "O Holy Night," we sing, "A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices." Grieving people around you feel the weariness of life and death in this world and wonder how anyone around them can rejoice. They are in desperate need of the reality of Christ to break through their loneliness and despair. While we don't want to

preach at them, we do look for the opportunity to share with them the comfort and joy to be found in the coming of God himself in Christ to rescue us. The life of Jesus that began in a wooden cradle will culminate in death on a wooden cross. But it will not be a senseless, meaningless death. It will be a death-conquering death, followed by new resurrection life. The writer of Hebrews explains, "The Son became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14 NLT). The power death has now, to bring so much sorrow, will not be the way it is forever. What Christ set in motion when he defeated death at his first coming will come to its full fruition when he comes again.

This is our great hope at Christmas, and the hope we have to share with those who are grieving at Christmas—that "yonder breaks a new and glorious morn." The Christ who came as a baby and died as our substitute will one day return to consummate his kingdom. And when he does, "he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore" (Revelation 21:4).



Scheduled Training

Please contact your Safe Environment Facilitator at your parish for a list of trainings or check Virtus.org.

THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

This year the Archdiocese was audited by the USCCB on our compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. We are audited every year, however, this year was an actual on site audit. The auditor interviewed clergy, employees, and volunteers throughout the Archdiocese and he reviewed many of our files and databases. For all those who participated, thank you!! We have not received the results of the audit, however, we should be compliant.

Audits are always time consuming and stressful. However, the purpose of the audit isn't to catch us doing something wrong but to show us our deficiencies. Even though we will probably be compliant with this audit, there are still areas where we can improve. That is the focus of the Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment. We must always be improving in order to protect children, our community, and in order to rebuild trust within our Church.

One of the areas that we need to improve was on parish audits. Starting January 2020, we will be conducting parish audits (see page 1). Once again, the goal isn't to "bust parishes" but to show the parish where it can improve.

The Archdiocese believes that education is the key to prevention and as of early December, over 36 thousand adults have been trained on abuse prevention. That is an incredible number! This accomplishment could not have been achieved if it wasn't for the Safe Environment Facilitators spreading the word and doing all the hard work at the parishes and schools. We are amazed and incredibly grateful for everything that these individuals do.

- Steve Martinez





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