



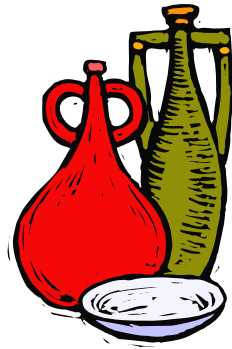
Catholic Diocese of Cleveland
Catholic Charities
Parish & Community Ministries
Department for Marriage & Family Ministry



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Earthen Vessels



Newsletter for the Separated & Divorced-- Ministry of Compassion

But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us.

2 Cor. 4:7

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Bah, Humbug!

By William H. Boomer, M.A., Director, Department for Marriage & Family Ministry

Do you ever dread the pervasive pressure to be productively busy and cheerful, all the while keeping a peaceful composure during the holidays?

Join me in saying, "**Bah, Humbug!**" Not in rejecting the joy of Christmas the way Scrooge intended, but in the sense that "*Humbug*" means "*something designed to deceive or mislead*" or "*an attitude or spirit of pretense or deception.*"

Let's be real! The Christmas holidays are bittersweet and there is no way around this.

We feel the powerful mix of joy and happiness along with regret and loss. We remember the past and have more dreams for the future. Satisfying gatherings are punctuated by feelings of loneliness.

This season brings out the paradox of life and this is how it is supposed to be. "*Bah, Humbug!*" on any attempts to deny this.

Jesus is *Emmanuel*—literally "*God with us*", who fulfilled Old Testament promises with his first coming and will fulfill His own promise when he comes again.

Meanwhile, we live in the "in-

between-times" that can be a confusing mixture of hope and despair. In this issue, find hope from Jesus' restorative love described by Fr. Jonathan Zingales, practical wisdom from Sr. Lorraine Durkalski along with an inspiring real life Christmas miracle and practical helps.

Be kind to yourself and others this season. Bring "*the hopes and fears of all the years*" to the "*Lord Emmanuel*" (*O Little Town of Bethlehem*). **In His paradox you will find peace!**

Restorative Love

By Rev. Jonathan Zingales, Ed.D., J.C.L.
Tribunal, Diocese of Cleveland



A Fable. *Once there was a talented girl who loved playing the violin. She studied and practiced and by the age of 30 was a very famous violinist. People came from far and wide to hear her perform. One night, during a sold out performance, her music was interrupted by an obvious mistake. The only thing she could do was start over.*

After beginning again, she was able to play the piece

perfectly. When she finished playing, everyone rose to their feet and applauded for 10 minutes. She (and they) were glad that she knew how to start over.

Having the capacity to start over, whether as single parent or future spouse in a partnership of life and love, is one of the decision points facing anyone who has experienced the tragedy of divorce. My experience in

ministering to individuals at the parish and Tribunal levels for over 25 years has provided the background for this insight.

Any attempt to quantify the profound sense of anguish and self-recrimination that an individual experiences prior, during, and after a failed marital relationship is futile.

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Restorative Love

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However, if an individual is to experience the redemptive power of suffering witnessed most powerfully in Jesus Christ's great love for us, I believe openness to "restorative love" is crucial. Let me explain. Borrowing some elements from the concept of restorative justice, which emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior through a cooperative process that includes, to the extent possible, victim, perpetrator, and community, restorative love seeks to repair first and primarily those inner dynamics that are not readily apparent in the aftermath of a divorce.

Restorative love is giving up the hope that the past could have been different, and starting over. Unless or until those inner dynamics, for example, forgiveness, trust, giving and receiving love from another, and a willingness to appropriate oneself for the good of another are restored and renewed, an individual will have a significant struggle mustering the energy to "start over again."

Initially, addressing the external dynamics of restorative love, that is, interacting with a former spouse and their family members and friends may be challenging. However, in some cases, for the good of children now faced with shared parenting, a spouse requires inner strength to find some common ground with a former spouse. Initiating a relationship with the Lord through personal prayer and spiritual guidance/direction is essential to develop this inner strength, that is, restorative love's inner dynamics. As Advent and Christmas approach, the words of the evangelist Luke serve as a powerful motivator: "... for nothing is impossible with God." (Lk. 1:37)

While spiritual guidance/direction among the lay faithful is emerging as a powerful method for spiritual growth and development, those who are healing from divorce may also benefit significantly from this experience. Articulating specific goals for a counseling relationship is important. Similarly, a specific goal of seeking the Lord's strength and direction in acknowledging mistakes and "starting

over" provides a focused area for spiritual growth. One of the goals of spiritual direction may be as basic as making sense out of the suffering an individual is experiencing.

In his book *Making Sense Out of Suffering*, the Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft insightfully finds the ultimate meaning of suffering in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. His most striking insight is how in literature, including the biblical story of Job, the main character must undergo suffering before the final triumph of good over evil. He urges us to view ourselves as the main character in the midst of our own life stories. Jesus experienced evil and He suffered. Through His death and resurrection, He overcame evil. We can unite our sufferings to His; suffering can have redemptive value. God wouldn't permit any evil if He didn't allow for good to come from the same evil.

At Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, the sacred art in the sanctuary demonstrates the redemptive value of suffering and a powerful visual of what could be called "gratitude in suffering". Above the altar of sacrifice is a traditional crucifix depicting Christ's death. However, immediately behind this crucifix in the apse of the church there is a larger than life painting of the resurrected Christ with his hands reaching to the heavens. Suffering was not in vain, it did not stop on the hill of the cross. The suffering, gratefully, led to resurrection, to everlasting love, to eternal redemption. In my experience an individual may appreciate more fully and personally the redemptive value of suffering through the process of spiritual direction or counseling.

Starting over can be a humbling experience. However, it has been said that the "saints are the sinners who started over after they fell." Through the process of restorative love an individual is able to strengthen his or her relationship with God, with themselves, and with subsequent relationships.

Father Zingales is a priest and pastor in the Diocese of Cleveland and a member of the Diocesan Tribunal.

Merry Christmas?

St. Lorraine Durkalski, LPCC

How do you feel when someone wishes you a “Merry Christmas?” Do you join in the festivities and return the greeting? Or do you respond with “Bah humbug” and wish the whole season was over?

- ◆ It can be difficult to be in an environment where people are celebrating and you just don’t feel the same way. You do have some options. You can “fake it until you make it.” This would entail going along with the crowd and hoping that you will eventually share their joy. Remember and re-enact some of your favorite memories...make cookies, send a card or two to your favorite people, watch a Christmas program, go to a concert. Don’t judge yourself if you don’t “feel the joy.” Allow yourself to be carried along with the wave and hopefully you might be swept away into a more positive spirit.
- ◆ Another possibility is to “lay low” and limit your involvement in the festivities. Take care of yourself by finding activities that you enjoy and include only the people with whom you feel comfortable. Gently decline going to events where you believe the stress will be unbearable. Thank your friends or family for the invitation and simply tell them that you are tending to yourself. Set a boundary. You do not owe everyone an explanation. You have the right to decide what you need at this moment in your life. If you feel that you will be pressured to explain, compose a simple sentence that you can use to respond to well-meaning, but sometimes intrusive, friends or family members.
- ◆ Pray. Remember that *Jesus is the reason for the season*. Spend quality time with Him. Know that He understands whatever you are going through. Start or continue a journal where you can write about your feelings. Read the nativity story in Luke or Matthew’s gospels. Imagine what it would be like to witness the birth of the Messiah. Reflect on how His birth has made a difference in your life, over 2000 years later. Consider what the purpose of your life is on this earth. Look at the big picture of your life. Watch the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life”, and recognize that whatever pain you might be experiencing in this moment can be lessened by recognizing the many blessings you have in your life.
- ◆ Misery supposedly loves company; however, is that the message Jesus came to bring us? Even Scrooge changed his disposition after being enlightened by a few nights of unrest. Whatever you decide to do, try not to be Scrooge and possibly dampen the Christmas joy that others might be experiencing. Joy can be contagious and ,if you open yourself to it, you may find that you caught it! ***God bless us everyone!***

Joy can be contagious—if you open yourself to it, you may find that you caught it!

Sr. Lorraine Durkalski is a vowed member of the Sisters of St. Joseph, of the Third Order of St. Francis. She is a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor and has a private counseling practice on the property of St. Basil Church in Brecksville. She is a trained Gestalt therapist and specializes in couples and individual counseling. Sr. Lorraine is on the panel of most insurance companies, and you can reach her at 440-526-8488.

Emmanuel - God with Us
Matthew 1:22-23

A Christmas Miracle: Who says that God does not hear prayers?

It was my first Christmas alone with the children, and I was not looking forward to it. I was in the midst of a divorce, and child support was not yet established. Trying to make ends meet was very difficult, and I had very little food for our traditional Christmas meal. The year had proven to be very difficult. Without the help my family gave me, I don't think I could have made it.

However, I was especially embarrassed and ashamed to let my family know that I needed help again. I had applied for public assistance, but it had not been approved. I tried to get a job, but did not have the necessary skills since I had been a stay-at-home mother for many years. I was desperate! I even applied for a position as a "sausage stuffer", only to be told that they would only take someone who was experienced at the local meat market. Imagine that!

*Away in a manger,
 No crib for His bed
 The little Lord Jesus
 Laid down His sweet head*

Our church choir was practicing this song. I was in the choir, and the words of the song hit home with me because I was living in my mother's house. I had had to flee my home, leaving all of my belongings. "No crib for His bed" the song continued. I had beds for the children, but my bed was a mattress on a floor that a friend had given me instead of discarding it. I told her I would take it, not really letting her know my plight because of my shame. The song took on a new meaning for me..."The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head".

I understood how Mary and Joseph were away in a strange land; houses were filled, and the stable was given to them, speaking of its own poverty. The wonderment and mystery of Christmas took hold of me as I saw that, despite poverty and a strange land, love was there...the gift of the Father of his Son to all men.

*Be near me, Lord Jesus,
 I ask Thee to stay
 Close by me forever
 And love me I pray*

This verse remained with me. I stayed afterwards and prayed in the quiet of the church, "Lord, I have nothing to give to the children, no tree, no presents. Be near me, Lord Jesus this Christmas and present us with the gift of your miracle in our family. I ask you to stay close to us in our hearts so that the children would feel your presence in a special way. As you stay with us, please love us in our brokenness."



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Emmanuel – God with Us

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“And, if you will, I pray for a miracle in obtaining at least some food from your heavenly coffers to help us celebrate your birth.” I left with a feeling of peace and began to focus on how the children could experience a new meaning to Christmas other than the traditional presents.

Three days later I took a walk with my youngest children to a nearby park, where we made “angels” in the snow. My daughter tried to make many angels so they could follow us home to be with us for Christmas. This way, she explained, they could come to life and play with her and her sister. As I walked up the steps of our house, I reflected on my 3-year- old daughter’s vivid imagination and the faith of the child!

When I opened the door, my oldest child pointed to seven boxes of food on the floor! She said that a man from a church had heard about our plight and wanted us to have a wonderful Christmas. I was filled with wonderment as I saw that the Lord had answered my prayer. I looked in the boxes of food, and each one contained a turkey, which meant that we had seven turkeys! I started to laugh and prayed in the silence of my heart “Thank you, Lord, but you could have put in a ham in one of the boxes because we are really going to get very tired of eating turkey!”

As I look back many years later, that particular Christmas was a special time for us as a family, because we had grown to love each other in a new way. We had realized the love of Christmas that goes beyond the material gifts that we give each other. Today, we still hold a tradition that the giving of a “material” gift has to be accompanied by a “spiritual” gift for that person in our family.

That could mean a special act of service to help a family member, or writing a poem, a message of love or even a simple prayer of love. It reminds us of Christ’s message to “love one another”. It means that we must love each other despite life’s difficulties.

This is not the end of the story of my Christmas miracle. The day after Christmas I heard a knock at the door. When I opened the door, I saw some old friends that I had not seen in years. I was overjoyed to see them, but wondered why they had come. It turned out they had heard of my being alone with my seven children. Then they presented me with the biggest fruit basket I have ever seen!

But that was not all...they also gave me a huge box and as I opened it...you guessed it...there was a large ham in the box with a card that said: “God hears prayers and loves you and your children.”

***Bless all the dear children
In thy tender care
And fit us for heaven
To live with Thee there***

A true story from an anonymous author



DSWC of Akron

By Frank Papa, Chairman
DSWC of Akron



The Divorced, Separated and Widowed Catholics of Akron (DSWC) has been a Christian support group in Summit County since the mid-70's. Over the past three years, our group has experienced a large increase in membership. All the Glory to God that He allows us to touch the lives of many people.

We have two regularly-scheduled monthly programs pertaining to divorce and/or widowhood. On the second Monday of each month, we have a guest speaker covering one of several diverse topics. Recent presentations have included a priest speaking on "Getting Through the Holiday Season", and a chiropractor discussing "Vitamins, Herbs and Healthy Eating." We also have a "Caring and Sharing" session on the fourth Monday of each month for persons looking for help not only with divorce and/or widowhood issues, but also for those looking for help with self-improvement and relationship-building.

We cover topics from "Handling Grief" to "Surviving Abusive Relationships". All "Caring and Sharing" group sessions are facilitated by licensed professionals. DSWC members don't pretend to be social workers or personal counselors, we just want to be friends and help others by sharing our experiences.

Our group has grown over the past three years due to added focus on various social events. We find that many people struggle with loneliness and especially the stigma of going places alone. Many single people rarely enjoy a meal in a restaurant due to the loneliness and/or discomfort of eating alone.

The DSWC offers a person the opportunity to go out on a regular basis with a group. When we attend a restaurant, it's not uncommon for at least 10-15 people to enjoy each other's company over dinner. We sponsor many social events including fairs, visits to wineries, concerts, nature hikes, and sporting events.

We also have enjoyed numerous theme parties, including an annual potluck dinner where everyone brings a dish representing their nationality. These parties have drawn upwards of 20-30 people. While we are not a dating club, we have had couples meet and date through the group. There is no better place to meet someone with similar Christian values than through a church-sponsored group.

While the DSWC consists primarily of people from Summit County, our events are open to all Christians who wish to attend. For more information on the DSWC, please call Sharon McMahon at (330) 612-3635 or Frank Papa at (330) 801-0527 or email us at dswcakron@yahoo.com.

There is no better place to meet someone with similar Christian values than through a church-sponsored group.

Catholic Diocese of Cleveland
Catholic Charities Parish &
Community Ministries
Department for Marriage &
Family Ministry



William H. Boomer, Director
7911 Detroit Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44102
Phone 216-334-2971

The Department for Marriage and Family Ministry's mission is to respond to the needs of families through development of pastoral programs that are administered through parishes and community leaders that focus on the teachings of the Catholic Church on marriage and family issues. In regards to the Separated and Divorced Ministry, the office has developed a collaborative ministry throughout the Diocese of Cleveland for parish districts to share resources and outreach to divorced Catholics. This would include educational programs, retreats, support groups, single parenting groups as well as provide referrals to counselors and other community resources. There are also brochures and materials published by the office to help families. For additional information, please contact Carol Petro, LSW, Marriage and Family Specialist for the Separated, Divorced and Remarriage Ministry at 216-334-2975 or e-mail at clpetro@clevelandcatholiccharities.org.

Programs and Resources

www.foryourmarriage.org

This website is an initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Search on "Second Marriages" for helpful information.

Lake/Geauga County

www.divorced-separated.net

Call Karen Jubeck at 440-352-8282

For more workshops and divorce recovery support groups and programs, please visit

www.clevelandcatholiccharities.org/mfm

Click on **Divorce Recovery**

For **referrals to counselors** in your area, please contact the Department for Marriage and Family Ministry at 216-334-2975 or

clpetro@clevelandcatholiccharities.org

Catholic Divorce Ministry—www.nacsdc.org



Recommended Reading

[A Woman's Guide to Healing the Heartbreak of Divorce](#)

By Catholic Author and Speaker Rose Sweet

Encouraging, hope-filled, and humorous.

FirstStep Program

FirstStep (a.k.a. QuickStart) is a simplified way to begin your petition for a **Declaration of Invalidity** (a.k.a. Annulment). The QuickStart program does not shorten the process of hearing a case, which is defined by Canon Law and remains the same in all cases. For the current schedule, check

www.dioceseofcleveland.org/tribunal, or call

216-696-6525 ext. 4000 (Cleveland)

800-869-6525 ext 4000 (Toll-free, Ohio only)

Remarriage Preparation

Cana II is a marriage preparation series for couples in which a) one or both have been married before or b) one or both of the spouses will become a stepparent. It includes a step-parenting series for those with children under 18.

For 2011 dates and registration, check our website www.clevelandcatholiccharities.org.

The Director and Staff of the Marriage and Family Office wish you and yours a Blessed Christmas and a Peaceful New Year! You are in our prayers.