

Connect with others without tinsel trappings

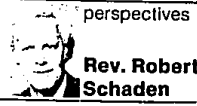
BY NOW the holiday trimmings are packed away or thrown out. We are out of the December greens and into the January white sales. Only a few short weeks ago there was a major priority alive within us — connecting with one another. Many folks traveled for thousands of miles to be with family. As Wilford Brimley of oatmeal fame would say, it was simply "the right thing to do."

OTHERS SENT cards across the land and around the corner because they wanted to connect. Long-distance phone companies jingled their bells with glee. And callers put up with busy signals because connecting was important.

People were nicer to each other. Those who have little were the grateful recipients of food baskets filled with the generosity of those who have more.

Even weapons were put down, if only for a few hours, while combatants created a weak illusion of togetherness. Sentiments growing out of a birth in long ago Bethlehem were sung on both sides of the West Bank.

WHAT WOULD happen if creatures of another planet were to study the desire and the ability of humans



Rev. Robert Schaden

to connect with each other?

They may conclude that people do better at caring and connecting in the presence of evergreens draped with tinsel and colored lights.

The idea of trying to keep the holiday spirit alive in the blue weeks of late winter is not a new one. Although the lights have been put away and competition is more than connecting, the warmth of human concern is as healing now — and as necessary — as it was underneath the mistletoe last month.

THE LONELY dwellers of convalescent homes are as anxious to connect with someone as they were when visitors to their sterile establishments were looking for the "right thing to do" at holiday time.

Elderly neighbors are as boosted by a visit in February as they were in December.

As one such person remarked to me: "You would think that I was a

tree ornament. Folks aren't interested in them after the season, don't you know." Her remarks were more a statement than a question.

The holiday mood is cross-cultural. One of our local television stations ran a holiday message in which people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds joined in a common message.

AS I RECALL that message, I am led to wonder what would happen in 1988 if those who sang carols with people of other places, colors and persuasions in December threw the same effort in the direction of connecting with these same people in February or March.

While the lights twinkle we talk of men and women of good will. But once the needles on the tree dry out, it's back to "us" and "them." We return to the world of old and young, believers and nonbelievers, straights and gays, married and divorced, management and labor, liberal and conservative. And all through the house not a connection is made.

Let's not wait until the sleigh hits the roof again before we reach out to someone. Who will it be this week?

The Rev. Robert Schaden is with Newman House at Schoolcraft College in Livonia.

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Salvation Army, CP to help

The Salvation Army and Consumers Power Co. have launched another PeopleCare program for the elderly, low-income and unemployed families.

Edgar L. Doss, CP's metro region general manager in Royal Oak, said PeopleCare is an annual fund-raising effort among the utility's customers.

Clarence W. Harvey, Salvation Army's eastern Michigan divisional commander, said his organization will administer the program, using funds to help provide food, housing, energy and other necessities. The

Salvation Army alone will determine eligibility for assistance.

The 640,000 CP customers are being asked to pledge \$3 by checking a box on their January gas bills. The amount of the pledge will be added to their February bill. More than \$3 can be given by writing a check to "The Salvation Army/PeopleCare."

In addition, Consumers Power is donating \$100,000 in bill credits that the Salvation Army can use to help needy people with their utility bills. The bill credits will be limited to use

as a last resort for residential customers when no other form of energy assistance is available.

Doss said PeopleCare was started in 1983 at the suggestion of company employees. It is the offshoot of informal food and clothing drives for the needy that employees had organized in various areas of the state.

Since the PeopleCare program began, more than \$1.5 million has been raised. In 1987 alone, some 2,000 Michigan families (nearly 6,000 people) received assistance.

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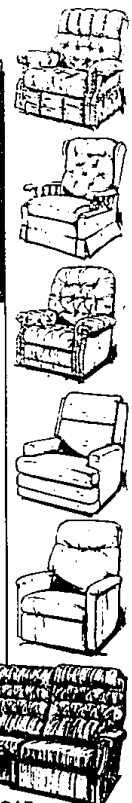
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