

# Santa takes over Christmas spirit

"THE TOYS are scattered and broken, I fear, and St. Nicholas won't come again for a year" so go the words of a familiar song.

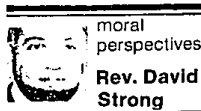
How did we celebrate Christmas? Those who have small children experienced the excitement and anticipation of these little ones. In many ways, Christmas is especially for children.

Yet we shudder at how commercialization of the holiday marches on. It now appears that our economy is at stake when we hear the count of Christmas sales, week by week.

Money becomes the single most important element of the season, for we seem to buy for ourselves and our family without restraint. Santa becomes the symbol of this orgy.

THE MOST common grasp of Santa is that he is the one who rewards us for being good.

Parents tell me how they have to buy an equal number of gifts for each of the children. As the children grow older, they even compare prices of their gifts. This perversion of



moral perspectives  
**Rev. David Strong**

the Christmas spirit hardly seems checked by the religious meaning of Christmas.

Actually Christmas begins with Dec. 25 rather than ending that day. The core of Christmas is the sacrificial gift of love by God coming into a human person.

AN ARTIST friend of mine foreshadows the end of the story by drawing a cross into the structure of the manger. From the beginning to the end, the Christmas event is full of self-giving sacrifice.

A mother told me that her small son likes to give a present more than he enjoys receiving one. My response is that of a cynic: Too soon he will

learn from our culture to want all he can get.

On the other hand, there are always surprising gifts at Christmas. A woman working two jobs hands me an envelope "for a needy family," she says. I hardly dare open it for it seems so sacred an event. Inside she has placed \$50. I am deeply touched.

SANTA is still the supreme symbol of the season.

I entered a Roman Catholic hospital to see a Santa statue with a baby Jesus in his hands. I did not have time to read the long notation by its side.

The image bothered me: Santa, the image of getting, a fantasy of the season, Christ, the image of God entering into human history.

I protested the mixing of the two images only to be informed that St. Nicholas is a person who lived in the fourth century. Yet it also appears that fantasy was added to this historical figure from the beginning.

THE SEASON of Christmas extends until Jan. 6. There is still time, if we are not already overwhelmed by the bills that have resulted from our orgy, to give sacrificially as a symbol of the season.

Lloyd C. Douglas says that the best gifts are those that are given without the recipient knowing who gave them. This is done most often through charities and churches. The greatest reward, according to Douglas, is in keeping the secret within your heart that you gave to another.

Christmas is still the season when we may give sacrificially as an expression of the true meaning of the time. The gift we give is not as important as the condition of our hearts when we give.

True giving arises out of gratitude. Giving sacrificially from the heart is a difficult deed in our culture. It remains the greatest expression of the divine will.

The Rev. David Strong is pastor at St. Matthew United Methodist Church in Livonia.

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# Depression: a common malady

Dear Jo:

Would you please write about depression in the elderly in your column? I understand that it is the most common mental health problem in this age group.

Mrs. W.M., Western reader

Dear Mrs. M.:

Depression, the illness that affects the entire mind and body, is the most common medical problem in all ages.

So far, its cause is unknown. Formerly, depression was blamed on a unhappy event in a person's life such as the death of a spouse, or on a psychological problem. But now experts know that depression often strikes many people who have no reason to be sad, nor do they have a psychiatric diagnosis.

Depression is difficult to diagnose because the symptoms mimic other illnesses. So often it is confused with low blood sugar, sinus headaches, changes associated with menopause,

gerontology



**A. Jolayne Farrell**

vitamin deficiencies and even "burnout."

A PERSON with depression usually experiences most of the following symptoms:

- Sad feelings.
- Ongoing fatigue even after resting.
- Feelings of worthlessness even though there is no reason to feel that way.
- Bursting into tears for no apparent reason.
- Lack of enthusiasm for things that were formerly of interest.
- Little or no interest in sex.

- Irritability for no apparent reason.
- Frequent headaches.
- Constipation, diarrhea or other gastrointestinal discomfort.
- Weight gain or weight loss.
- Poor concentration.
- Increased forgetfulness.
- Sleep disturbances.

DEPRESSION is a serious illness that can lead to suicide.

Even though there are many ways to treat depression, the starting point should be to seek medical help and to work closely with a doctor to

effect a cure.

Depression can be treated with antidepressant medication, counseling, diet, exercise or a combination of all four.

Depression inflicts unhappiness on the affected person's family as well as himself. Along with medical treatment, close family members are an invaluable help in getting the depressed person back to good mental health.

Readers can write to Jolayne Farrell at 11 Cynthia Crescent, Richmond Hill, Ont. L4E 1J3.

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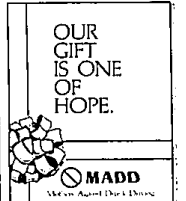
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