



THE NUTCRACKER AT TPAC Page 17

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NEW RESIDENT churchguide

Wanamaker Road Baptist Church



See inside back cover!

Salvation Army Kicks Off Red Kettle Campaign



The season of giving is upon us, and the familiar sound of bell ringing has announced the Salvation Army's annual Red Kettle Campaign. The campaign kicked off in late November at select locations.

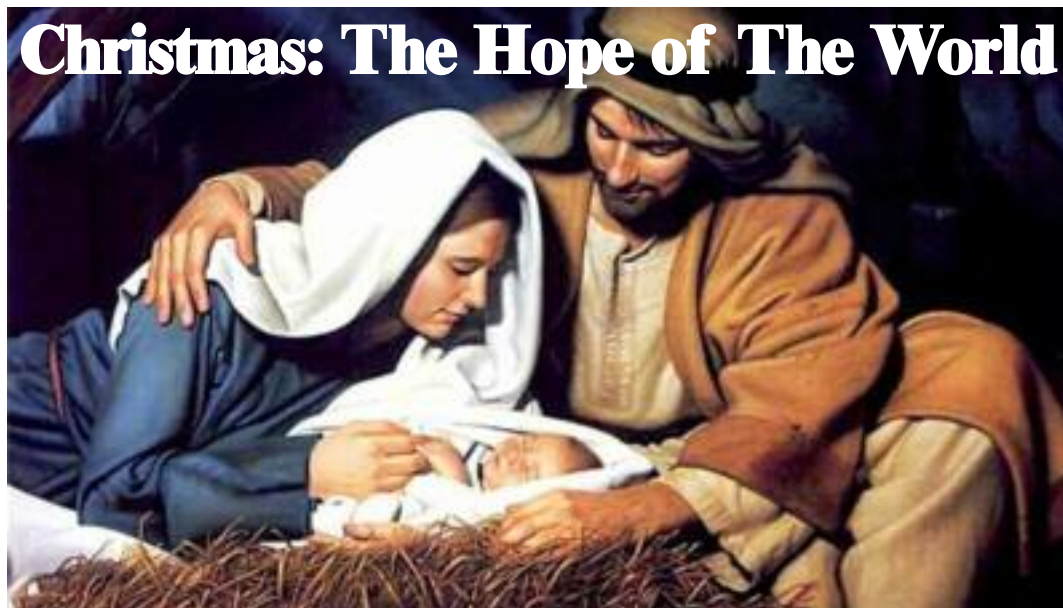
The Salvation Army has expressed hope that this Christmas season the many that are in need in our community will not be forgotten for emergency assistance, food and shelter.

Volunteers are still needed for bell ringing.

"Our goal this year is to show people

■ Please see RED KETTLE page 2

Christmas: The Hope of The World



By **Clint Decker**

On the eve of history's first Christmas, it was a dark time for the Jewish people. Their land was occupied by the Roman Empire. The Lord God had not spoken to them for hundreds of years. Heaven's voice was silent. Their religious texts spoke of prophecies about a King that would rise up from among them. They an-

ticipated this King, that He would be their deliverer from Roman rule. How would darkness be turned to light? How would despair be turned to hope?

In approximately 4 B.C. a divine earthquake caused a split right down the middle of human history – the birth of Jesus Christ. It was like the rising of the sun dispelling the dark-

ness. It was a new era for mankind.

The Jewish prophet Isaiah, 700 years earlier, foretold about the coming of a Messiah who would become the hope, not just of the Jewish people, but of all nations. Isaiah wrote, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name

■ Please see CHRISTMAS page 2

Researcher finds connection between faith and happiness



People who pray and connect with God are more likely to experience happiness and enjoy positive mental health, research shows.

Extensive research into 13-to-25-year-olds has long found "religion is good for you," said Josh Packard, Ph.D., executive director of Springtide Research Institute.

"Faith and spirituality are good for you," Packard says. "If you're a person who believes in some kind of higher power and has a connection to that higher power, you're generally flourishing more than your peers. Those who pray more tend to be flourishing more in all areas, including their mental health."

■ Please see FAITH page 2

Gary's holds Festival of Lights

Christmas is a time where families come together to celebrate their love for one-another, creating memories by taking family pictures, enjoying traditions like watching Christmas movies or listening to carols...and of course sharing their favorite Christmas treats. Many families exchange gifts to show those they love how much they care about them. Christmas at Gary's allows families to stroll the farm at their leisure and have conversations about the

meaning of Christmas.

No matter what the season, Faith and Family is what is dear to the hearts of the folks at Gary's. For several years they have been a part of many family Fall traditions. Now they are branching out, and feel they have the setting to share the story of Jesus Christ at Christmas.

This year, they will present a Holiday Festival starting on the Friday after

■ Please see FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS page 3



Horton's Festival of Lights features luminaries

In 1989, the South Brown Ministerial Association (SBCMA) began a project to bring the story of Christ's life to the area during the Christmas season. What began as a one-year experiment was so well-received that it has continued nearly every year with a few exceptions.

This year the Luminaries – the Festival of Lights – will take place from 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm Sunday, December 4 at the junction of U.S. Highway 73 and Kansas Highway 20 in Horton. The event will be extended if cars are still going through the display.

The Luminaries stem from the old Spanish custom of putting candles in paper bags weighted with sand. The candles are lit and put along the path to one's home on

Christmas Eve to light the way for the Christ Child to come into the home and into the lives of the people who live there.

In Horton, 1,300 candles light the 10-block route, which will have 17 living scenes of representative times in the life of Christ. Members of Horton-area churches will dress in Biblical clothes and form still pictures from the prophesy in Isaiah about the coming of Christ to His crucifixion and, ultimately, His ascension into heaven.

Colorful costumes, music, backdrops designed by the churches and even live animals will be part of the scenes along the way, it was reported.

The city of Horton turns off street lights in this area so that the luminaries are even more pro-

nounced. It is described as a beautiful, peaceful display that people can enjoy from the comfort of their own vehicles. As each car drives through, they can tune into KNZA 103.9 and have Christmas music played for their enjoyment. The route begins at 14th and Central Streets and ends at 14th and First Avenue East. A route guide indicating all of the scenes will be handed out at the beginning of the drive.

The SBCMA asks that participants remain in their vehicles, as people who are walking can be a distraction to those who are driving. Also, because the lights are low, uneven places in the sidewalks may not be seen as well, and there could be a danger of falling.

The Luminaries is a free event,



but there is an opportunity at the end of the route for participants to make free-will donations to the Ministerial Association. The money will be used to support the ministries of the SBCMA.

Churches in the SBCMA are

First Baptist of Horton, First Christian of Horton, First United Methodist of Horton, St. Leo's Catholic of Horton, United Church of Muscotah, Everest Christian, and Zion Lutheran of Everest.

FAITH

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Data pointing to increased wellness among the faithful are particularly pertinent in the midst of challenging times, pointing to a potential solution to cultural conundrums. It's not the first time, or the first study that has linked the two.

"Young people would be better off if more of them had a connection to something bigger than themselves," Packard said. "But also, I think a lot of religious institutions and leaders would do well to take mental health into account so faith and belief could be appropriately part of somebody's overall approach to health."

Although young people might not

be aligning with Christianity at rates they once were, Packard said many still see themselves as spiritual, and more than half pray. While the separation from biblical truth is undoubtedly troubling for Christians, these realities at least show openness to a higher power. That intrigue could lead to receptive gospel introductions.

"We see lots of desire from Gen Z to embark on these conversations and explorations of meaning and purpose and, 'Why am I here on this earth?'" he said. "So the desire hasn't gone away. The exploration hasn't gone away."

Other recent research has found Christians are exceptional at giving, fare better in relationships, are happier and more content, and have better mental health.

RED KETTLE

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the myriad of ways they can get involved to make a positive impact here in the Topeka community," said Captain Cristian Lopez-Azompa, commander of The Salvation Army Topeka corps. "From donating in a kettle to donating your time by ringing at a kettle, there's a lot of ways the public can support our

community this holiday season."

The iconic Red Kettle campaign has increased options for people to donate via smartphone. This year, donors can utilize PayPal and Venmo along with Apple Pay and Google Pay to make their donations. For online shoppers, the Topeka Virtual Kettle is available 24 hours a day at: Donate-Topeka.com.

Individuals/groups looking to ring at Red Kettle can sign up at Register-

toRing.com. For all other volunteer opportunities at the Topeka Salvation Army location, call 785-233-9648.

The money raised stays local. It provides food boxes and toys for registered families through the Angel Tree Program that assists folks in need. It also provides funding for assistance year-round through social service programs, including emergency assistance in rent/utilities, food pantry, and the meals.

CHRISTMAS

continued from page 1

shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Jesus was the fulfillment of this prediction. The birth of the Christ-child was a divine light borne into darkness. As He grew up and settled into His heaven-sent role, the public responded and a divine unstoppable movement took shape. However, His followers soon became disillusioned at His messaging. He was not becoming the national Savior they envisioned. Soon, the dreams they had of Jesus turning back the Roman Empire started to fade away.

Instead, Jesus told the crowds, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10) He also said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but who-

ever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk. 9:23) This meant if they wanted to follow Him, they must give up pursuing their agenda and take up God's. This was much different than expected.

Jesus' focus was the hearts and souls of mankind. He purposed to deliver them from the bondage of sin and lead them to spiritual freedom. He was born to govern the lives of precious souls, not a nation.

The lesson of Christmas teaches that the change our world needs is ultimately spiritual. Like the Jewish people, we can look around and see our world filled with oppression and injustice and wonder how it all can change. Like them, our hope can be for a type of national savior to be raised up. This is how we naturally think. In times of national crisis, we instinctively begin with what we can do with our own intellect and resources. And history is replete with the rise and fall of political, military, religious and other types of national figures to help save their nation.

Law, policies, programs, regulations, committees, organizations, investiga-

tions. All these have their place. At best, they can curb, reduce or control lawlessness and corruption, but they cannot eliminate it. Why? Because the heart of the problem is the human heart. Jeremiah once wrote, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Then he penned God's own words, "I the Lord search the heart and test the mind..." (Jer. 17:10)

Christmas shows us that evil in the human heart is the greatest threat to the future of the world. God so believed this truth, He sent His only Son to be born of a virgin, then to die on a cross and rise again. Through this, Christ conquered evil. And to all who come to Him in repentance and faith, He will provide forgiveness of sin and a transformed heart and life.

A prayer for you. "Lord God, open our eyes to see beyond the physical to the spiritual. Bring men and women to humble themselves before you and be changed by your grace and mercy. In Jesus' name. Amen."

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Mike Rowe concerned about men not working

The nation is facing a crisis of men who not only don't work but are not seeking jobs, television host Mike Rowe told Tucker Carlson on "Tucker Carlson Tonight." Seven million able-bodied men between the ages of 25 and 40 are not participating in the labor force. "That's never happened in peacetime — ever," he said.

The "How Things Work" host highlighted economist Nick Eberstadt's work, which looks at the labor market post-COVID-19 and why employers are having trouble getting people to re-enter the workforce.

"Economists like Nick Eberstadt



take a dim view of it — they're worried, and they're trying to inject that into the conversation at a time when we're still looking at the unemployment number as the true harbinger of what's really going on," Rowe said.

"We're looking at the wrong thing. We're looking at not what it means to have a bunch of people unemployed but what does it mean to have a bunch of opportunity that nobody gives a darn about?"

Eberstadt explained in an op-ed for the "Wall Street Journal" that the country is facing an "unprecedented peacetime labor shortage, with employers practically begging for workers, while vast numbers of grown men and women sit on the sidelines of the economy. Never has work been so readily available in modern America; never have so many been uninterested in taking it."

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

continued from page 1

Thanksgiving, called Festival of Lights. The festival will feature Christmas characters such as Santa and the Grinch, nearly one million lights, plenty of food items, shopping and plenty more to help you celebrate with your loved ones this season.

But at Gary's, they believe there is another reason to celebrate, and that's because of the greatest gift we've ever been given: that we are loved so much by God in heaven that he gave us His only son — Jesus — to be born as a baby and live among us. And they want to share this story with you.

At Gary's Festival of Lights, you will be taken on an excursion halfway around the world and over two thousand years ago to when a little baby was born in obscurity — but would ultimately offer redemption for us all.

While walking through "The Greatest Gift" you will encounter scenes depicting Mary and Joseph's story, the Wisemen's journey, and the Nativity.

Other holiday-themed activities on the farm will include a choreographed 32-foot singing Christmas tree, multiple photo-ops and a magnitude of lights throughout the farm.

Guests can also visit Santa in his workshop on Fridays and Saturdays. But watch out! While Santa's taking Mrs Claus out, the Grinch will sneak in and take over his workshop! Be on the lookout for the mischievous green guy trying to steal the Christmas Cheer!

After visiting Santa in his workshop, head into the tunnel of lights! Scan the QR Code as you enter Secular Row and test your knowledge of traditional and modern holiday music and movies.

Bring your camera as you enter Candy Cane Lane where you will find many opportunities to take family photos. Be it a giant swing, a life size Christ-



mas greeting card or visiting the land of frozen - you won't want to miss taking your Holiday family photos to create those lasting memories!

The familiar tasty treats guests are familiar with will also be available. This includes the pumpkin and blueberry donuts, seasonal flavored fudge made on the farm, funnel cakes and specialty hot chocolate drinks.

The farm opens at 5:30 pm and the last admission onto the farm is at 8:30pm on the following dates:

- November 25th through December 18th on Friday, Saturday and Sunday ONLY

- December 21st through December 23rd open at 5:30pm

(CLOSED Christmas Eve and Christmas Day)

- December 26th through December 30th open at 5:30pm

Gary's is located at 5991 17th Street, Grantville, KS 66429, off of Highway 24. For more information or for tickets, go to <https://garysfarm-fest.com> or call (785) 246-0800.

C5Alive Christmas Luncheon to celebrate with fun & games

The December C5 Christmas Luncheon will be held December 8, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Fairlawn Plaza Mall, featuring some fun Christmas activities.

The cost to attend a C5 luncheon is \$10 for C5 members and first-time guests who RSVP, and \$12 at the door. Non-members and repeat guests pay \$15. C5 luncheons are open to the public. RSVPs and inquiries can be sent to info@C5Alive.org.

"POWER" luncheons are held on the second Thursday of each month. The next one will be held on January 12.

C5Alive is part of the Capital City Christian Chamber of Commerce

(C5), an organization dedicated to developing and uniting Christian Leadership in the community: businesses, non-profits and churches.

C5 also hosts other periodic events, including EASTER-FEST, the annual Topeka Easter Parade and Family Fun Fair, held on N. Kansas Avenue on the day before Easter. Find details at Topeka Easter Parade on facebook. The annual Topeka Fall Fest will be on October 7, 2023 at The Vinewood.

C5 members may also sponsor luncheons and other events as a way to promote their organizations.

For more information about C5, go to www.facebook.com/C5Alive, C5Alive.org, or call 785-640-6399.



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Senate rejects religious protections as it passes Marriage Act

The U.S. Senate has rejected amendments to protect religious freedom as it approved the controversial Respect for Marriage Act.

Twelve Republicans, including several who are retiring like Missouri's Roy Blunt, joined 49 Democrats in the 61-36 vote to adopt a measure approved by the House of Representatives in July. The House still must approve the Senate's minor revisions of the original proposal and President Joe Biden has pledged to sign it into law.

The vote on the controversial proposal capped a series of procedural hurdles requiring at least 60 votes that proponents overcame with support from the chamber's 50 Democrats and the dozen Republicans who supported final passage.

In addition to Roy Blunt, the eleven other Senators include Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.), Rob Portman (R-Ohio), Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), Susan Collins (R-Maine), Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), Richard Burr (R-N.C.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Mitt Romney (R-Utah), and Todd Young (R-Ind.).

Late on Nov. 28, during a lengthy roll call on a cloture motion to limit debate, three of the dozen GOP senators supporting the bill withheld their votes until proponents agreed to allow floor votes on amendments offered by Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah), Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla.), and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.). Each of the proposed amendments was designed to ease the threats posed by the proposal to religious freedom.

Observers say the law will seriously negatively impact churches and other houses of worship, Christian schools, daycares and faith-based non-profits.

Those concerns were outlined during debate on the proposal, opponents claimed the bill will inflict profound damage on freedom of religion, including after proponents accepted an amendment they said would remedy such fears.

In a floor speech delivered before the voting began on the amendments, Lankford asked, "Is today about respecting the rights of all or about silencing some and respecting others?"

The Oklahoma Republican told



colleagues: "There are three major problems in the bill on the issue of religious liberty. If these three things are not changed in this bill, it will put religious liberty at great risk for millions of Americans who ... have sincerely held religious beliefs."

The first of the three, according to Lankford, is the bill's reference to "any individual or entity acting under the color of state law" would be subject to penalties for failing to support same-sex or interracial marriage.

"This would be an entity that a state hires to fulfill something for them. This could be a private prison, for example, it could also be an adoption agency [or] foster care agencies. It could be an entity that actually does housing for immigrants families, a homeless shelter contracted by the state to provide services. It could be any number of entities," Lankford said.

Many such agencies are faith-based, and the Respect for Marriage Act "would be a new restriction on those religious entities that formally held contracts that then would very well be pushed out from providing those services ... or abandoning their faith."

The second problem Lankford pointed to was the proposal's creation of a new "private right of action" for "an individual who senses that they have been harmed" by a covered entity.

"Now, it's not defined what 'harm' means in this new statute, it just says if someone feels they've been harmed, they would now have the opportunity to sue someone else," Lankford said.

"If Congress creates a new right to sue people, there will be a lot of lawsuits ... For anyone who believes this

new right to sue people won't be used and won't be used quickly by lawyers and outsider groups all around the country, you are kidding yourself. What it really does is it silences any individual who may disagree and it discourages any faith-based entity from cooperating with government."

The third problem lies in the bill's language saying "If a benefit does not arise from a marriage." Lankford said he asked multiple lawyers what that phrase means and received widely different answers.

"It is clear what it doesn't mean. When it says all these different rights being granted that don't include marriage, it doesn't include your belief about marriage," Lankford pointed out. The result is beliefs about marriage can still be the basis for litigation against individuals and entities.

Lankford's amendment needed only a simple majority but was defeated on a 45-52 vote. No Democrat supported it, while Republican Sens. Portman, Collins, and Murkowski voted against it.

The Lee amendment gained the support of all 12 of the Republican supporters of the proposal but the only Democrat to support it was Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.). The amendment thus failed 48-49. The Rubio amendment also failed on a 48-49 vote.

Baldwin said the amended proposal is needed to "give the millions of Americans in same-sex and interracial marriages the certainty that they will continue to enjoy the freedoms, rights, and responsibilities afforded to all other marriages."

Opponents argue the proposal provides official sanction for discrimination against individual citizens, faith-based schools, social

service agencies and non-profits, and small businesses that oppose non-traditional marriage out of deeply held religious principles and practices.

"If a nonprofit is engaged in behavior that is 'contrary to public policy,' then the IRS has the discretion to strip that organization of its tax-exempt status," Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) senior counsel Greg Baylor told The Epoch Times on Nov. 19.

"Our concern is the IRS is going to point to the Respect for Marriage Act and say, 'These organizations that aren't recognizing same-sex marriage are acting inconsistently with public policy articulated in the 'Respect for Marriage Act,'" Baylor said.

Heritage Foundation vice president for domestic policy Roger Severino was even more blunt in his assessment of the proposal, telling The Epoch Times: "This legislation is

nothing more than a way to weaponize the federal government against people of faith, and it offers no additional benefits or protections that same-sex couples don't already have.

"Instead, this bill encourages radical activists to sue religious schools, colleges, and adoption agencies and will empower Biden's 87,000 new IRS agents to revoke the tax-exempt status of faith-based nonprofits. Congress should be protecting our First Amendment rights instead of pushing divisive legislation that nobody needs."

The Supreme Court's 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges decision legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. The Supreme Court's 1967 Loving v. Virginia legalized interracial marriage in America.

Not voting were Sens. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.), Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) and Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.).

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Topeka Metro to launch on-demand transportation in 2023

The Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority announces plans to launch a microtransit service for the southeast part of Topeka, starting in January 2023. The on-demand service, named MOD (Metro On-Demand), will allow customers to request curb-to-curb transportation within specific service areas. In addition, passengers will be able to request rides that would arrive

within 15 minutes, which is similar to ride share services.

"As we continue to look for new ways to improve, we believe the more personalized nature of microtransit will be a great addition to our service," said

Bob Nugent, Topeka Metro general manager. "Microtransit has



been around for a while and has proven to be a more expedient

and cost-effective way for folks to travel to where they need to go."

Passengers can access residential and commercial locations, or even connect with a fixed route bus for travel outside the defined zones. Hours of MOD operation will be Monday through Friday from 5:35 a.m. to

6:40 p.m., and Saturday from 8:15 a.m. to 6:40 p.m. Fees for this shared ride program will be \$2 for a one-way ride. Reduced Fare and youth pricing options are available.

Topeka Metro will host a series of public meetings beginning in December 2022 to explain how MOD will operate and to answer questions.

More than 10,000 lives saved in first two months after Dobbs

Last summer's decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn Roe v. Wade already is saving lives. At least 10,000 fewer legal abortions were performed in the United States in the two months following the Dobbs decision, according to a report on the website FiveThirtyEight.

But while most states saw reductions, states like Kansas saw an increase in abortions.

The study, compiled by the pro-abortion non-profit #WeCount, part of the Society for Family Planning, noted that 10,570 fewer abortions took place in July and August than estimates from before the overturn of Roe.

The data compared the number of legal abortions across each state from April through August to illustrate the difference before and after the Supreme Court's ruling. States that enacted more-restrictive abortion laws in the wake of the decision saw a drop of more than 22,000 abortions, while states that did not see an aggregate increase of about 12,000.

The states with the highest increases by percentage included Kansas, North Carolina, Colorado and Illinois.

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WHICH IS HIGHER PRIORITY: CREDIT CARD OR THE TRUCK?

Dear Dave,

We are ready to start Baby Step 2, and we have about \$35,000 in total debt. Our two smallest debts, a credit card and a truck we financed, are both \$4,500 right now, and we have a combined income of about \$95,000 a year. Since the credit card has a higher interest rate, my wife thinks we should pay it off first. To me, the truck is a necessity, and we should pay it off first for that reason. What do you say?

Grant

Dear Grant,

When the rule of paying off debts from smallest to largest doesn't apply, I think you should attack the one with the larger interest rate first. In your case, that'd be the credit card debt.

I get what you're saying about the truck. And I agree that transportation is a necessity. You guys might be in a bind

if something happened and you lost a vehicle, but it's also a situation you could probably work around for a little while if you had no choice. My guess is you have friends or relatives who could loan you a car in a pinch, and public transportation is an option for some folks. So yeah, knock out the credit card first, then move on to the truck.

Do you understand my reasoning, Grant? Going this route serves two purposes: First, it will save you a little money. And second, I've got a feeling it will fire up your wife, and get her on board with the idea of you two getting your finances in order even more than she already is.

She's taking this whole thing pretty seriously if she's eyeballing interest rates, buddy. She loves the thought of you two having control of your money. Use this momentum to work together as a team, and knock out that debt!

— Dave

Unpaid hospital bill went from \$2,700 to \$3,500. What should I do?

Dear Dave,

I recently had a judgment filed against me for an unpaid, old hospital bill. Is it possible to negotiate things with the lawyer? Originally, the charges were \$2,700 but now they have increased to \$3,500, and I am not sure why the amount has risen. I have made several phone calls asking him for a detailed statement of the account, but all I have received is a payment booklet. What is your advice?

Ronnie

Dear Ronnie,

Are you sure you've been speaking directly to the lawyer? I'm guessing the reason you haven't gotten a real answer to your question is because you've actually been talking to some low-level staffer

How to Get Cheap (or Free) Health Insurance if You Retire Early

By Ryan Shumaker
Smartvestor Pro at
The Retirement Team



I often hear when I first meet with someone that the only reason they are still working is to pay for health insurance until they can get on Medicare at age 65. No doubt health insurance when you are in your late 50s and early 60s is quite expensive. A private insurance plan through the marketplace (HealthCare.Gov) for a 62 year old couple living in Topeka runs from a whopping \$21,420 a year to an astronomical \$37,788 a year, depending on the plan chosen. That's even the cheaper non smoker rates. If you smoke or are older than 62, the rates will be even higher. What might be even more outrageous than the price of the cheapest insurance possible is the deductible on it, which is a staggering \$16,000! Seeing this kind of sticker shock it is no wonder that so many believe they can't afford to retire early solely because of the exorbitant cost for private health insurance.

The thing is, though, that health insurance can actually be cheaper if you retire early if you do proper planning and it's been that way now for over a decade. The key to cheap, or free, healthcare if you retire early is knowing how the tax credit subsidies work for health insurance and how to be strategic on where you get your income from before turning 65. With good planning, a 62 year old married couple could receive a massive \$27,228 a year in free tax credit money to pay for their health insurance. That's more than what many of the plans even cost in the health insurance marketplace, effectively making the health insurance completely free.

In order to be eligible for the full amount you need to have the amount of income that shows up on your tax return (but not necessarily the income you pay tax on or actually have) to be

or paralegal. If you have been talking to the lawyer, there's a pretty good chance he's running a small debt collections or debt lawsuit machine. If this is the case, he probably gets a piece of whatever he collects. That means he's out to collect as much as possible, as quickly as he can.

You might consider changing tactics, and see if you can talk to the hospital administrator. Propose giving them \$2,000, or whatever reasonable amount you can afford, on the agreement that the hospital

accept it as payment in full. Hospitals and doctor's offices are often some of the easiest folks to work with when it comes to paying off debt, but people have to be proactive and make an honest, good faith effort to make it happen.

There's a moral, as well as legal, responsibility involved when it comes to paying off bills or debt, Ronnie. You should always pay what you owe if at all possible.

— Dave

around \$19,000 if married, \$14,000 if single. The higher your income goes up, the more this tax credit shrinks. In the past if your income got too high you would go from getting a large tax credit to nothing at all if your income was just \$1 too high and over the threshold. One of the few good things (in our opinion) for retirees that came from the stimulus bill number 3 (called the American Rescue Plan) signed into law in March 2021 is the elimination of this threshold cliff. Instead of the subsidy suddenly ending it instead slowly decreases as income goes up. Even if you have a six figure income, you'll still get a subsidy of some sort now. The lower the income that shows up on your tax return, though, the larger the subsidy will be as long as it is not too low. If it is too low you get nothing at all.

Here is where smart tax planning ahead of time comes into play. If you were to take money from a pension buyout, IRA, 401k (or other company retirement plan like a TSP, 457 or 403b) and switch that money over to a Roth ahead of time you can still have a high actual income while having a low amount show up on your tax return. This will then allow you to get a larger health insurance tax credit subsidy that could fully pay for your insurance. The reason behind this is that any money that comes out of a Roth does NOT show up anywhere on your tax return. From the government's perspective, it is as if the money no longer exists once it goes to a Roth. A person can take enough out of their investments that have taxes on them (like 401ks, IRAs, and pension buyouts) to get the maximum tax credit for insurance and take the rest of the income they want and need from the Roth. This is something we have been helping people do to allow them to retire earlier for years.

Great retirement planning is much more than just picking investments. There are many moving parts when it comes to income planning, tax reduc-

tion planning, tax credit planning, when to start Social Security, etc. that all interrelate and change when you go from working and earning paychecks to retiring and wanting paychecks. Far too many people end up paying more than their fair share in taxes (and/or miss out on tax credits) and work for longer than they actually need to just because they either don't know about how best to navigate all of these complex topics or aren't well informed. If you're putting off retiring just because of potential health insurance costs you likely don't have to. Schedule a time to talk with us at The Retirement Team at 785-228-0222 if you're in this situation, if you'd like to save on taxes in retirement, and/or need help with figuring out how to get the most out of Social Security. We strive to help people do the best they can in all financial aspects of retirement including, but not just, investments.

Other great articles about retirement, investing, and tax reduction can be seen at RetireTopeka.com/blog.

Ryan can be contacted at 785-228-0222 or RetireTopeka.com.

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Generational wealth – What it is and how to create it

By Jim Hanna

In a recent survey from Ameriprise Financial, more than 3 out of four Americans (78%) said they have taken at least one step to build generational wealth. But what exactly constitutes “generational wealth” – and how can you achieve it?

The most common answer (44%), according to survey respondents, is wealth in excess of \$500,000 that’s passed down to loved ones. Depending on your financial situation, half a million dollars may or may not sound like a lot of money. But one thing is clear: no matter how much you intend to one day bestow upon your family and friends, it helps to have a plan.

If you, like the majority of survey respondents (68%), say passing generational wealth onto your heirs is important to you, here are some things to keep in mind:

Strategies for growing generational wealth

1. Be a strategic saver. Rather than leaving wealth accumulation to chance, strategic savers set goals and work to actively increase their savings. They make regular contributions to savings accounts. Active saving curbs spending and influences earning behavior. They may defer purchases, work longer, pursue higher-paying employment, or make other choices (and sacrifices) to ensure their savings goals are met.

2. Invest in stocks. Investors who are serious about income growth utilize the stock market. Most experts recommend a buy-and-hold approach to optimize earnings over time. A risk-adjusted, diversified, and balanced portfolio can help investors meet their investment goals.

3. Invest in real estate. Historically, property values have increased over time, making homeownership a leading method of wealth accumulation. Investors may also diversify their portfolios with Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and other purchases of property.

4. Pass along financial wisdom

Financial values are another important asset to pass

along to heirs. Many families find it beneficial to discuss their financial decisions with their adult children and stepchildren. Clear communication can help establish realistic expectations and avoid surprises and conflicts when it comes time to pass along your assets.

5. Consider “Giving While Living”

Plans for sharing generational wealth can include giving now rather than waiting to hand down assets after death. Beneficiaries are often adult children but can also include charitable organizations. Giving in the present can satisfy the desire to help now and enable you to see the impact of your generosity. That said, it shouldn’t come at the risk of your financial security, so make sure you have the means necessary before writing a check to your favorite cause.

Building generational wealth is a lifelong process. Along the way, an experienced financial advisor can help you develop a financial plan and set achievable goals aligned to your estate planning needs. Your advisor can work with you and your estate planning attorney to ensure your will facilitates your wishes for sharing generational wealth.

1 – Ameriprise Money and Family study (*Money & Family: A new study on generational wealth*)

Jim Hanna, CFP®, MBA, CKA®, is a Private Wealth Advisor and Certified Kingdom Advisor® with Heart Financial Partners a private wealth advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC, in Topeka, Kansas. He specializes in fee-based financial planning and asset management strategies and has been in practice for over 25 years. To contact him, ameripriseadvisors.com/james.c.hanna, 785.358.6278 x19, 601 S Kansas Ave., Topeka, KS 66603.

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Hanna

Take simple steps to prepare for tax return

By Peggy Beasterfield
Owner, Peggy's Tax and Accounting Service

The Internal Revenue Service encourages taxpayers to take simple steps before the end of the year to make filing their 2022 federal tax return easier.



Consider financial transactions that occurred in 2022, if they're taxable and how they should be reported. Develop an electronic or paper recordkeeping system to store tax-related information in one place for easy access. Keep copies of filed tax returns and their supporting documents for at least three years. Confirm that your employer, bank and other payers have your current mailing address and email address to ensure you receive your year-end financial statements. Typically, year-end forms start arriving by mail or are available online in mid-to-late January.

As taxpayers gather tax records, they should remember that most income is taxable. This includes unemployment income, refund interest and income from the gig economy and digital assets.

Taxpayers should report the income they earned, including from part-time work, side jobs or the sale of goods. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 lowered the reporting threshold for third-party networks that process payments for those doing business. Prior to 2022, Form 1099-K was issued for third-party payment network transactions only if the total number of transactions exceeded 200 for the year and the aggregate amount of these transactions exceeded \$20,000. Now a single transaction exceeding \$600 can trigger a 1099-K. The lower information reporting threshold and the summary of income on Form 1099-K enables taxpayers to more easily track the amounts received. Remember, money received through third-party payment applications from friends and relatives as personal gifts or reimbursements for personal expenses is not taxable.



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Celebrate the Holidays in Downtown Topeka!

As we enter the Holiday season, Downtown is looking better than ever! People are getting in the Christmas Spirit!

Christmas shopping in Down-town Topeka can be fun, with all the unique shops and a bit of nostalgia in the air. It might remind you of a time when shopping was more exciting, more personal, and less of a chore.

Following are some tidbits from some of your friendly downtown merchants. Why not take a trip downtown and visit them?



A Full-Service Florist & Gift Shop

Absolute Design by Brenda, 629 S. Kansas Avenue, offers hand-selected flowers and exquisite designs with delivery throughout the Topeka area. They have an expansive line of gifts, jewelry and home decor for all your holiday and year-round needs.

This locally-owned Topeka florist delivers courteous, professional service and the highest quality floral and gift items around. Their experienced designers can create floral designs that will

complement any occasion and meet your budget and style expectations as well. Daily delivery service is available to all local funeral homes, hospitals and nursing homes.

You can even save \$5.00 by using the coupon on this page!

You can also order or wire flowers 24 hours a day at the website: www.absolute-design-by-brenda.com.

Taking chocolate to a new level

Owners Nick & Terry Xidis at Hazel Hill Chocolate, 724 S. Kansas Avenue, have been a staple in Downtown Topeka for years.

Hazel Hill, Terry's grandmother, is a symbol of their dedication to a family tradition of "the best in everything they do." Nick is the third generation chocolatier, and they use only the finest ingredients, chocolate, fresh cream and butter, to produce handmade treats that explode with flavor.

Lately, Nick has been making hand-crafted chocolate from cacao (coco beans) that import from around the globe. Much like fine wine, each cacao

origin produces a unique flavor profile in the finished chocolate.

"There are only a couple of hundred companies in the US that hand craft chocolate," Nick said. "We just put a new bar out made from cacao from the Semuliki Forest in Uganda. It's a 72% cacao dark chocolate that has a delightful flavor."

It's not just Topekans that delight in Hazel Hill chocolates.

"In 2019, three of our handcrafted chocolate bars won bronze in the International Chocolate Awards Americas competition," Nick said. "In 2020 our

sea salt caramel won the gold medal in the Chocolate Alliance competition. Both of these competitions include entries from more than 400 craft chocolate professionals."

Whatever your preference may be – handmade chocolate truffles, home-style fudge, crispy-creamy caramel apples or something else – at Hazel Hill they fashion delightful treats for every palate.

Need a gift basket, gift box, or just a few delicious chocolates to go? They'll take care of all the packing and shipping, too!



When you need a break

For your coffee emergency, go Downtown to Julis's Coffee and Bistro – a locally owned, woman owned, Veteran owned and operated coffee shop offering legit house coffee and all manner of espresso drinks.

Now featuring "Made in the USA" coffee grown and roasted in Hawaii, with aloha flavors like toasted coconut, chocolate and vanilla macadamia nut. Buy a bag to take home!

See the new place at 911 S. Kansas Avenue, having relocated from 8th Street last year. The new space has easier access – no more stairs to the front door. Local favorites are still available, like the Turkey Lurkey and house made Cranberry Almond Chicken Salad for lunch. Fresh salads, wraps and tasty paninis make it perfect for casual dining. Daily house made specials keep it fresh and exciting.

Check out the menus online at www.juliscoffeeandbistro.com and

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The staff at Juli's wants to take this opportunity to thank the Topeka community for their support since 2016. Despite the pandemic and relocation Juli's remained OPEN! Community matters and that is the reason Topeka has been home for 6 generations of the Bistro family. Remember us for Great Coffee, Better Food and Happy Holidays!

A little bit of Heaven

Working side-by-side at Cashmere Popcorn, Bill and Angie Anderson's goal is to create a high-quality product in every handcrafted batch of popcorn, and provide it to you with unmatched customer service.

Faith and family is the driving force behind this amazing company. In fact, their family motto has always been, and will always be, "Thanks Be To God!"

They produce, package and market all the popcorn. With about twenty flavors to choose from, you'll find a little bit of heaven in every bag. Hours are Tuesday-Friday 10-6 and Saturday 10-4.

Cashmere Popcorn would like to wish everyone a Blessed Christmas Season, thanks for supporting local.

Diamonds are Forever

With the Christmas season in full swing, you'll find many specials and gift ideas at David's Jewelers, 623 S. Kansas - a family business that has served Topeka for four generations, with over 50 years in business.

Diamond rings, pendants and earrings usually top the list but they also offer vivid colored gemstones in unique settings, watches, clocks, statues and fine crystal.

"Gifts can start at \$20.00 and go from there," said Mitzi from behind the counter at David's. "We will be glad to help you find that special gift for that special someone."



Holiday Memories, Events, & Gift Ideas!

Check Out Some of the Upcoming Holiday Events & Activities

While you're making your way around the downtown area, check out all of the new things to look at on both sides of the street. There are lots of new features! And watch for these downtown events and opportunities during the holiday season:

ICE SKATING - Daily through Jan. 29, 11am-9pm, Every Plaza downtown. 5 skate sessions each day: 11am-12:30pm, 1-2:30pm, 3pm-4:30pm, 5pm-6:30pm, 7pm-8:30pm. For info: dylan.tyler@spectrap.com. Tickets: <https://www.simplertix.com/e/the-core-first-ice-rink-tickets-118216>



FIRST FRIDAY ART MARKET - Downtown and NOTO arts district. Arts, antiques, fine crafts, flea market items, snacks & beverages, entertainment and more.

MIRACLE ON KANSAS AVENUE PARADE - Dec. 3, 6-8pm, Down-



town Topeka. Lighted parade at 5th & Kansas. www.topeka-partnership.com/gtp-events

NUTCRACKER BALLET - Dec. 9, 7:30pm; Dec. 10, 1:30pm; Dec. 11, 1:30pm at TPAC. Ballet Midwest's holiday staple. Ticket: \$22 adults, \$20 seniors 55+, \$14 students 18 & under. Family pack for two adult & two students is \$60. Tickets at TPAC box office, and Barbara's Conservatory of Dance. www.balletmidwest.net.

RED STOCKING BREAKFAST - Dec. 10, 7:30-10:30am, The Pennant, 915 S. Kansas Ave. Get tickets in advance at www.kcls.org or at the door. Children 10 & under eat free. Benefits KCSL's child abuse preven-

tion programs and services.

"IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE" FILM SCREENING - Dec. 16, 7pm, Jayhawk Theater. Adults \$7; students/senior/military \$5 admission. Doors open at 6pm

THE NUTCRACKER BY KANSAS BALLET ACADEMY - Dec. 17 at 7pm & 18 at 1pm, TPAC. Tickets available at the TPAC box office or Ticketmaster.com. For info: 785-234-2787



THE KREADY HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR - Dec. 23, 6:30pm, TPAC. Benefit show for TPAC is for the whole family.



TOPEKA SWING DANCE LESSONS - Tuesdays, 7-8:45pm, no partner required, Jayhawk Theatre, 720 SW Jackson. <http://jayhawktheatre.org/events>

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Christmas Memories

Why do we celebrate Christmas?

Christians the world over celebrate Christmas in honor of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. Various Christmas traditions have been associated with the celebration of Christmas, and different cultures celebrate different ways. The unifying factor is the historical fact that Jesus was born, c. 5 BC. The angel who appeared to the shepherds the night of Jesus' birth said, "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born

to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

We celebrate Christmas because, as the angel said, the birth of Jesus Christ is "good news." Good news is meant to be celebrated. In fact, the angel said the news of Jesus' birth would cause "great joy" and would be "for all the people"—the joyful celebration would be universal. People around the globe would be glad for this occasion.

We celebrate Christmas because, as the angel said, "A Savior has been born

to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." The three titles the angel applies to Jesus are important. Jesus is the Savior who delivers us from sin and death (Matthew 1:21). He is the human Messiah (or Christ) who fulfills the Law and the Prophets, showing that God is faithful (see Matthew 5:17). And He is the divine Lord who has entered our world: the Almighty has taken on human flesh; God and man have been fused together in an indivisible, eternal bond; God is truly with us (see Matthew 1:23).

In celebrating Christmas, we celebrate the Savior, because we needed deliverance. We celebrate the Christ in whom all of God's promises are "Yes" and "Amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20). We celebrate the Lord who in humility took on "the very nature of a servant" for our sakes (see Philippians 2:6-8).

We celebrate Christmas with gift-giving because of the "incredible gift" that God gave to us (2 Corinthians 9:15). We celebrate Christmas by stringing lights because the Light of the world has come to us (John 1:4; Isaiah 9:2). We celebrate Christmas with carols and choirs because they are expressive of joy and follow the examples of Mary and Zacharias and Simeon and the angels, all of whom extolled the Lord in poetry (Luke 1-2). We celebrate Christmas by decorating evergreen trees with stars and angels and tinsel because of the eternal life Jesus brings (John 4:14)—and stars and angels and beauty were all associated with Jesus' birth.

In celebrating Christmas we celebrate the love and condescension of God. In Texas in 1987, a toddler by the name of Jessica McClure fell into an eight-inch well casing. Down she went, becoming stuck twenty-two feet below ground. Once people discovered that "Baby Jessica" was in the well, they took immediate action. They didn't tell her to find a way to climb back up, and they didn't just shout happy thoughts to encourage her. No, they went down to where she was and got her. They did whatever it took. Rescuers worked



nonstop for fifty-eight hours to free her.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve fell. Down they went, dragging all humanity with them into the darkness and death of sin. And what did God do? He did not tell us to find our own way out of the mess we were in, and He did more than shout down happy thoughts to us from heaven. No, He came down to where we were and got us. That's what Christmas is all about—God's coming down to rescue

us, to do whatever it took to deliver us from sure death.

When even one person is in a life-threatening situation, we understand what has to be done. When God looked down at our sinful planet, He saw a whole world of people in mortal danger. We celebrate Christmas because it was at Christmastime that the Rescuer of all mankind came to save us from the hopeless situation we were in. God did not stay in heaven; He came down to where we are.

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4 Reasons for Joy This Holiday Season

It's the holiday season again. Homes down every street are decorated with lights and filled with people gathering and celebrating at the end of yet another year. The holidays are a time to feel joy and peace. However, in the hearts of many there is grief, anxiety, and hopelessness.

While many enjoy the season with picturesque traditional family-filled holiday dinners, some are struggling to keep their house clean while their kids make a mess everywhere they go. Some are even grieving a lost family member. For several different reasons, the holiday season is hard on many people, maybe even you.

WHERE IS THE JOY?

First, let's dive down into what "joy" actually means. The world can define joy based on outward situations and blessings. However, the joy that the Lord gives you is not what the world says it is.

"Chara," the greek word for joy used in Scripture, indicates a delight not born

of or dependent upon temporal experiences or blessings, but founded in a relationship with God. As your relationship with the Lord goes deeper, the joy in your heart gets bigger. Joy is not dependent on our ever-changing circumstances in this world. It is dependent on our ever-constant Savior that was born on Christmas day.

Count it all JOY my brothers and sisters, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

-James 1:2-4

Are you feeling less than joyful during the holidays? From Scripture, let's explore 4 reasons to be joyful during the holiday season even if you are struggling.

1. THE LORD'S PROMISE

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

-Psalm 118:24

For every day this Christmas season, we can rejoice in the fact that God sent His only son for us. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice so that we could live eternally alongside Him. Unfortunately, this broken world can be a heartbreaking at times. Things don't always go the way they should and it leaves us feeling empty inside. But the life of Jesus promises us that the world will not tear us down no matter how hard it tries. Having the hope of Jesus is a promise and comfort that can carry us through the hard times. God knows His exact plans for you, and sometimes He brings you out of your personal comfort for that plan. This season, listen to what God is telling you in your struggles and remember that He will not forsake you, especially during the difficult seasons.

2. MORE TIME TO SPEND WITH FAMILY

The holidays are when family is in town, and the kids have some time off



from school. Being with friends and family is a blessing from the Lord. It allows us to take some time and reflect on the year, and have some fun with our loved ones.

3. FOOD

Christmas is a time for GOOD food with family. We are blessed every day to be able to put food on our tables because God has provided us with it. This is true especially during the holidays when we have friends and family over to enjoy delicious holiday treats. We can have a little more joy this season when we reflect on not only the spiritual blessings of Christmas, but also the physical and tangible blessings that the Lord pro-

vides us every day.

4. CHRISTMAS MUSIC

This season is a time to spread joy through music about our Savior. Christmas music brings a message of hope into your drive to and from work, and it puts a little bit more joy in your heart. Listen to all your favorite Christmas classics, carols, and new holiday favorites now through Christmas day!

It's our prayer that you'll listen and take some time this season to reflect on the joy and hope that only Jesus can provide.

What other ways do you find joy in the Christmas season?

Finding Balance during the Holidays

It's easy to fall into the trap of believing that if our holiday celebrations don't look like they're straight out of a Hallmark movie then we're not doing a good enough job. We see others seemingly having more fun on social media. Our memories of holidays past are overshadowing the present. But if we allow ourselves to stay in this mindset, our fears will become reality. Let's explore four tips to manage expectations this holiday season:

1. Ignore Advertisements

A picture ready holiday meal on the table; couples walking hand-in-hand under romantic snowfall; excited children opening the perfect presents. It all sounds great, but the reality is that holidays can be messy, uncomfortable, tense, or even dreadful. Let go of high



expectations and enjoy the holidays for what they are.

2. Lower the Stakes

The higher the expectations we have for something, the higher the stakes are. If we don't meet our expectations, how-

ever unrealistic they might be, we feel like we've failed. Be reasonable in setting expectations and accept your own limitations. Do what works best for you and where you're at in life.

3. Attitude of Gratitude

Be grateful for the things you do have. You can't focus on this and the things you feel like you're lacking at the same time. Be thankful for the love, support, and connections you do have. Focus on what you value in life and where you find joy.

4. Make New Traditions

Reset your expectations and memories and make new traditions. Find things you like to do during the holidays. Try something new - whether it's staying in or going out, there isn't a wrong choice.

Blue Christmas, A Service of Hope and Healing, to be held

A local Topeka Church will hold their annual Blue Christmas Service, a service of hope and healing, on Sunday, December 4 at 3pm. The service is for those whose heart is heavy because of burdens this past year or years. The public is invited to come and listen to the words of hope and healing. There

will be music, scripture readings, prayers, mediation, anointing, and the Lord's Supper to acknowledge the loss you are feeling and the assurance that God is with you.

Stephen Ministers will be assisting at the service and will be available after the service to listen if you would like to share your con-

cerns.

The service will be held at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 3725 SW Wanamaker Dr., Topeka Ks 66614. If you have any questions, contact Pastor Kevin De-Hope or Mary Hume (parish nurse) at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church 785-271-0808



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Election shows the Kansas political landscape is shifting

This election may go down as one of the most bizarre ever. The results themselves (when they finally came in) were so chaotic that describing them would sound like the proverbial collection of blind men trying to explain the totality of an elephant based on their own personal perspective. Red wave? Blue wave? Victory for pro-abortion advocates? High gas and grocery prices, or just the triumph of incumbency?

Across the country there seem to be pockets of dominance for all the above and Kansas appears to have retained its red state status for the most part.

Certainly, after the August 2nd defeat of Value Them Both, Democrats had reason to be optimistic going into the general election. Democrat candidates running for the legislature were quick to point out to their constituents how their Republican opponents had voted on the measure. Also, campaign ads against 3rd District Republican Congressional candidate Amanda Adkins, Republican gubernatorial candidate Derek Schmidt and Attorney General candidate Kris Kobach all featured ads stating that they would support a ban on all abortions including those for rape, incest and the life of the mother. These three exceptions to abortion have all been supported by vast majorities of the public even though the first two are a minuscule part of those requested and the latter are not usually even considered to be abortions.

It's the culture, stupid.

Some years back the Democrat mantra was "It's the economy, stupid" and now that your 401K is down 20% or more, gas and grocery prices have skyrocketed, and inflation is roaring full blast Democrats have decided that what actually matters is their unholy sacrament of abortion.

The opposition to abortion bans, real or imagined, was the driving force behind the Democrats' attempts to blunt the "red wave" that was anticipated in response to the Biden administration's many failures and radical agenda. California, Vermont and Michigan had measures on their ballots to enshrine abortion into their Constitutions while Kentucky had a measure that attempted to clarify that abortion was not protected in the Kentucky Constitution. All three of the pro-abortion bills passed and the one that opposed abortion in Kentucky failed. Worse yet, a measure in Montana that would have protected babies born alive unbelievably failed.

The energizing effect that the Supreme Court's Dobbs decision had on Democrats across the country successfully

thwarted Republican attempts to take control of the Senate and limited control of the House to a very thin margin. Kansas state rep Pat Proctor from Leavenworth, who survived being targeted for defeat by Democrats, likened the effect to a dog catching a car. He pointed out that



many of the people who had proclaimed their loyalty to the pro-life movement became leery of what could become an all-out ban on abortion. The all or none nature of the various amendments gave the upper hand to Democrats given the constant polling that showed most Americans, including many Republicans, do not want total bans on abortion.

Kansas is still a red state.

Given the results of the August 2nd primary Democrats anticipated a very strong election cycle for them in Kansas. It did not materialize. Overall, Republicans were victorious at every level save for some local races. All four Republican incumbents to Congress were re-elected, Jerry Moran to the Senate and the 1st, 2nd and 4th District Congressmen all retained their seats.

Republicans also swept all four seats on the State Board of Education. The driving force here appears to be the feeling among many parents that schools are spending more time indoctrinating their children into leftist ideology than focusing on solid educational goals. Certainly, the data on achievement tests in Kansas bears that out. The Kansas Policy Institute monitors the state assessment scores and translates those into A to F scores. Based on those rankings 44.5% of Kansas schools received either a D or F ranking. Add the C's into that equation and 92% received a C or lower score.

Save for the gubernatorial contest, Republicans also took every statewide contest including a win by controversial Attorney

General candidate Kris Kobach. Indeed, Kobach received almost 29,000

votes more than gubernatorial candidate Derek Schmidt. Both Secretary of State Scott Schwab and Insurance Commissioner Vickie Schmidt were incumbents and Treasurer candidate Steve Johnson, a former state rep, was the House number cruncher. None were controversial and indeed, Vickie Schmidt even made some Democrat endorsement lists.

Democrats also focused on eliminating the Republican supermajority in the Kansas House. Several races were targeted and yet Republicans retained a one-vote super majority margin. Ironically, the balance of victory came with the election of Mike Thompson, a Wyandotte County Republican who distanced himself from the local party and focused on local Bonner Springs relationships instead.

Where Republicans failed.

There were three significant losses for Kansas Republicans, the loss of Johnson County as a Republican stronghold, the continuing loss of the 3rd District Congressional seat and the loss, again, of the governor's mansion. Of the three, two were inevitable while one was not.

Earlier this year the Kansas legislature received some notoriety for what was clearly gerrymandering in an attempt to retake the 3rd District Congressional seat. In order to reduce the number of Democrat votes in the 3rd District, the legislature split heavily Democrat Wyandotte County down the middle using Interstate 70 as the dividing line. The northern half was then placed in the 2nd District while the southern half remained in the 3rd District. Had they taken the time to chat with longtime political analyst, Dwight Sutherland they might have saved themselves both embarrassment and the fact that they may have put the 2nd District into play.

Sutherland has been charting the number of Democrat versus Republican registrations for some time now and is of the opinion that the entirety of Wyandotte County could have been removed from the equation and the increased power of Democrats in Johnson County would have still saved the day for incumbent Sharice Davids.

While the demographic change in voter registrations was one factor there were two other factors that contributed to the loss of both Republican 3rd District Congressional candidate Amanda Adkins and gubernatorial candidate, Derek Schmidt, outside money, and poor messaging.

Nationwide, coastal Democrats have figured out that races for congressional

seats and other important statewide offices in flyover country can be overwhelmed for the cost of a city council or district attorney's seat in their major urban areas. When Kris Kobach was the perceived opponent for the US Senate in 2020, outstate Democrats poured 29 million dollars into the race in an attempt to buy the seat. Fortunately for Republicans, Kobach lost in the primary and a former Congressman from the Big First District, Roger Marshall, managed to pull out the victory. The same occurred in this election and both Adkins and Schmidt were dramatically out spent by their opponents.

One could argue that Laura Kelly and Sharice Davids' incumbency itself would have led to large war chests and there may be some truth to that argument, but the one thing incumbency does not bring is a dominant message. Given the environment in DC with the Biden administration and the poor economic news plaguing Democrats in general, Republicans should have had the edge in messaging. However, in both the Adkins and Schmidt races (as well as the VTB campaign) the Democrat narrative prevailed.

In both races Democrats made Adkins and Schmidt's ties to former Kansas governor Sam Brownback their centerpiece. The ads focused on Brownback's tax policies and the false claim that he cut spending on education. According to Dwight Sutherland, those cuts to education were made by Brownback's predecessor, Kathleen Sebelius, owing to an economic downturn in the Kansas economy two years before Brownback took office. Despite that, I know of no attempt anywhere by either campaign to defend Brownback's record or to refute the false claims against a successful former Congressman, Senator and two term governor.

The myth of Dennis Pyle

Like many, I looked at the vote totals for the gubernatorial contest and noted that the difference between Laura Kelly's total and Schmidt's was roughly identical to the number of votes received by Pyle and concluded that he was the cause of Schmidt's defeat. That assumption was wrong. Certainly, Pyle's temper tantrum did Schmidt no favors, and it gave Democrats the opportunity of spending even more of their largesse attacking Schmidt from the right by funding much of Pyle's campaign. However, a closer examination of the numbers indicates that other factors were at play in Schmidt's defeat.

Normally, the top of the party's ticket receives the most votes and then totals

drop off the farther down the ballot one goes, but that was not the case this time. Below are the vote totals for the statewide races.

Had Schmidt even received the same number of votes as the next highest winning candidate, he would now be governor. Pyle received only 20,057 votes and it's doubtful that Schmidt would have received all of those votes had he not run. Furthermore, Brownback had the same issue when he ran and still prevailed despite a third party candidate receiving over 4% of the vote.

Schmidt cannot be faulted as a candidate. He campaigned more energetically than any other candidate, nor can the loss be attributed to ideology. Schwab, Johnson and Vickie Schmidt are all more moderate than Schmidt while Kobach was more conservative and more controversial and yet all four won. Clearly, Schmidt underperformed the rest of the ticket and so we're therefore left with money and messaging as possible culprits behind Schmidt's loss. Mike Egan, a major donor to conservative causes, argues that money was the dominant factor and increased funding very well might have put Schmidt over the top. That said, the pro and con forces on the Value Them Both campaign had similar amounts of money and yet left-wing messaging dominated the campaign.

The time has come when we can move Johnson County into the same column with Douglas and Wyandotte counties as Democrat strongholds. The change has been coming now for several election cycles and can't really be attributed to any single candidate or election. Democrats simply have a combination of more energy and positive demographic changes giving them the edge. In this latest race for County Commissioners and the Chair of the Commission, Mike Kelly, a left-wing attorney won the race for commission chair while all three of the commission seats were retained by incumbents, two Democrats and a Republican embraced by the Democrats.

In the statewide races, moderate Senator Jerry Moran lost in only three counties, Douglas, Wyandotte and Johnson. The only statewide Republican candidate to win in Johnson County was Vickie Schmidt. While there are still pockets of Republican majorities, there are fewer every cycle and several legislative candidates that were formerly moderate Republicans have either switched parties, or, like Melissa Rooker, lost to Democrats.

—John Altevogt / Metro Voice

Fatherhood changes men's brains according to MRI scans

The time fathers devote to child care every week has tripled over the past 50 years in the United States. The increase in fathers' involvement in child rearing is even steeper in countries that have expanded paid paternity leave or created incentives for fathers to take leave, such as Germany, Spain, Sweden and Iceland. And a growing body of research finds that children with engaged fathers do better on a range of outcomes, including physical health and cognitive performance.

Despite dads' rising participation in child care and their importance in the lives of their kids, there is surprisingly little research about how fatherhood affects men. Even fewer studies focus on the brain and biological changes that might support fathering.

It is no surprise that the transition to parenthood can be transformative for anyone with a new baby. For women who become biological mothers, pregnancy-related hormonal changes help to explain why a new mother's brain might change. But does fatherhood reshape the brains and bodies of men – who don't experience pregnancy directly – in ways that motivate their parenting? We set out to investigate this question in our recent study of first-time fathers in two countries.

Pregnancy's effect on a new mom's brain

Recent research has found compelling evidence that pregnancy can enhance neuroplasticity, or remodeling, in the structures of a woman's brain. Using magnetic resonance imaging, researchers have identified large-scale changes in the anatomy of women's brains from before to after pregnancy.

In one study, researchers in Spain scanned first-time mothers before conceiving, and again at two months after they gave birth. Compared with childless women, the new mothers' brain volume was smaller, suggesting that key brain structures actually shrank in size across pregnancy and the early postpartum period. The brain changes were so pronounced that an algorithm could easily differentiate the brain of a woman who had gone through a pregnancy from that of a woman with no



children.

All across the brain, these changes are visible in gray matter, the layer of tissue in the brain that is rich with neurons. Pregnancy appears to affect structures in the cortex – the most recently evolved, outer surface of the brain – including regions linked with thinking about others' minds, a process that researchers call “theory of mind.” Mothers also show brain changes in the subcortex – the more ancient structures nestled deeper within the brain that are linked with more primitive functions, including emotion and motivation.

Why do these structural brain changes happen after pregnancy?

Researchers believe these brain changes may facilitate mothers' sensitive caregiving of newborns, who demand constant attention and cannot verbalize their needs. Indeed, when mothers see photos or videos of their own infants, it activates many of the same brain regions that changed the most across pregnancy. It seems plausible that new mothers' brains change in ways that help them to respond to and care for their newborns.

But what about fathers? They do not experience pregnancy directly, but may take care of the new baby, too.

Dads' brains change, too

As with practicing any new skill, the experience of caring for an infant might leave a mark on the brains of new parents. This is what neuroscientists call experience-induced brain plasticity – like the brain changes that occur when you learn a new language or master a new musical instrument.

A sparse but growing body of research is observing this type of plasticity in fathers who experience the cognitive, physical and emotional demands of caring for a newborn without going through pregnancy. In terms of brain function, for instance, even gay male fathers who are primary caregivers show stronger connections between parenting brain regions when viewing their infants, compared with secondary male caregivers.

To learn more about plasticity in new dads' brains, our research groups at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and the Instituto de Investigación Sanitaria Gregorio Marañón in Madrid, associated with the Be-Mother project, collaborated on a new study. We recruited 40 men – 20 in Spain and 20 in California – and put each into an MRI scanner twice: first during their partner's pregnancy, and again after their baby was 6 months old. We also included a control group of 17 childless men.

We found several significant changes in the brains of fathers from prenatal to postpartum that did not emerge within the childless men we followed across the same time period. In both the Spanish and Californian samples, fathers' brain changes appeared in regions of the cortex that contribute to visual processing, attention and empathy toward the baby.

It's not clear yet whether simply spending more time parenting changes fathers' brains or the changes occur in men who are more motivated to spend time parenting. AJ_Watt/E+ via Getty Images

What remolds a new father's brain?

The degree of brain plasticity in fathers may be linked with how much they interact with their baby. Although fathers in many parts of the world are increasingly taking part in child care, paternal involvement varies widely across different men. This range of involvement may explain why we found more subtle brain changes in these fathers compared with those observed in first-time mothers. In fact, brain changes in fathers were almost half the magnitude of the changes observed in the mothers.

Social, cultural and psychological factors that determine how much fathers engage with their children may, in turn, influence changes to the fathering brain. Indeed, Spanish fathers, who, on average, have more generous paternity leave than fathers have in the U.S., displayed more pronounced changes in brain regions that support goal-directed attention, which may help fathers at-

tune to their infants' cues, compared with Californian fathers.

This finding raises the question of whether family policies that boost how much time dads spend on infant care during the early postpartum period may help support the development of the fathering brain. On the flip side, perhaps men who show more remodeling of the brain and hormones are also more motivated to participate in hands-on care.

Much more research is needed to tease out these questions and to figure out how best to intervene with fathers who may be at risk of having trouble adjusting to the parenting role. Despite the importance of fathers to child development, funding agencies have not tended to prioritize research on men becoming dads, but this may start to change as more findings like these emerge. Future studies with more detailed measures of postpartum caregiving can reveal more about parental brain plasticity in both men and women.



Why you need dental insurance in retirement.

Medicare doesn't pay for dental care.†

As good as Medicare is, it was never meant to cover everything. If you want protection, you need to purchase individual insurance.

Early detection can prevent small problems from becoming expensive ones.

The best way to avoid large dental bills is preventive care. Experts recommend checkups twice a year.

Previous dental work can wear out.

Your odds of having a dental problem only go up as you age.‡

Treatment is expensive — especially the services people over 50 often need.

Unexpected bills, like \$189 for a filling, or \$1,219 for a crown‡ can be a real burden, especially if you're on a fixed income.

When you're comparing plans ...

▶ Look for coverage that helps pay for major services.

▶ Look for coverage with no deductibles.

▶ Shop for coverage with no annual maximum on cash benefits.

Simply put — without dental insurance, there may be an important gap in your healthcare coverage.

† Medicare & You; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2021. ‡ How might my oral and dental health change as I age?; www.usnews.com, 11/30/2018. 3 American Dental Association, Health Policy Institute, 2018 Survey of Dental Fees, Copyright 2018, American Dental Association.

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metro
VOICE

MANAGING EDITOR



Lee Hartman
LHartman3@cox.net

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Nick Hartman, Dwight Widaman

ADVERTISING CONSULTANTS

Lee Hartman

785-640-6399; Voice@cox.net

Darcy Childs 785-249-6203
childs.darcy@gmail.com

NEWS & FEATURES

Carolyn Cogswell, Rob Mooney, Alan Goforth,
Clint Decker, Michael Foust, Dwight
Widaman, Lee Hartman

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Joe Boothe, Lee Hartman, Dwight Widaman

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CONTACT INFO

Offices: 2611 SW 17th St. (by appt.)
Correspondence & Payments:
P.O. Box 5724, Topeka, KS 66605
Phone/Fax: 785-235-3340
Voice@cox.net
MetroVoiceNews.com
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Parental Authority Is the Basis of Civilization

By Dennis Prager

As most Americans now realize, America is experiencing a societal breakdown. This should be obvious to anyone, even those facilitating this breakdown as they openly acknowledge they seek to break down American society.

This is a society that teaches its youngest citizens a suicidal lie: that America was founded in 1619, that it was built on slavery and that even today it is systemically racist. At the same time, it does not teach the fundamental moral fact that every culture practiced slavery — Arab, Muslim, African, Asian, Native American — and usually more viciously (e.g., Arab slave masters routinely castrated black slaves so that they could not reproduce) than in America.

This is a society that robs its youngest of sexual innocence. Teachers — nearly all of them women, the sex that society has always regarded as the natural guardians of sexual innocence — now routinely sexualize young people with discussions of sexual behavior and by having drag queens perform for them.

This is a society that has taken as a given that there are more than two sexes; that has Jewish and Christian clergy sign emails with “preferred pronouns”; that will praise the Disney Corporation for dropping all references to “boys and girls” from its theme park announcements.

This is a society in which refusing to say that men give birth can lead to social banning and the loss of one’s job and income.

This is a society that encourages violent crime. It elects prosecutors who allow violent criminals to avoid having to pay bail. Its elites advocate defunding police. It keeps raising the dollar amount of stolen goods that constitutes a felony. In short, America is now a society in which the



dominant message to would-be criminals is that crime pays.

This is a society in which fewer and fewer young people are marrying, fewer are having children, and more and more are having children without being married, usually without a father in the life of the child.

This all began with the demise of moral authority — and moral, social and intellectual chaos is the inevitable result.

Prior to the 1960s, America had moral authority — God, country, parents, the Bible, teachers, police, and clergy.

Not one of them is a normative authority today.

Starting in the 1960s, each one was overthrown. The ’60s motto “Never trust anyone over 30” perfectly embodied this — given that every one of these was older than 30. Soon, teachers were called by their first names and frequently talked back to, even cursed; on college campuses, “America” was often spelled “Amerika,” and the flag is now declared a symbol of white supremacy; police were referred to as “pigs”; clergy were rendered irrelevant; the American motto, “In God we trust,” was ignored or mocked; and the Bible went from the dominant book in American life to the trash heap of history.

Most important, parental authority rapidly declined.

Moral stability — in other words, civilization — is dependent on parental authority. Once that breaks down, all the others mentioned here also break down.

If you look at the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, you will notice that each tablet has five commandments. The first five are laws between man and God, while the second five commandments govern behavior toward fellow human beings (do not murder, steal, etc.). The first four “rest” on the Fifth; and the second four “rest” on the Tenth.

Taking the second tablet first, the four commandments that precede the Tenth depend on obedience to the Tenth Commandment. When people murder, commit adultery, steal or offer false testimony, it is almost always because they “covet” what their neighbor has — his property, his animals, his spouse.

Likewise, the first four commandments regarding God as the One Moral Authority rest on people obeying the Fifth Commandment: “Honor your father and mother.”

Parental moral authority is the vehicle to divine moral authority. That is why the Fifth Commandment, to honor one’s parents, is the only human-to-human commandment on the first tablet. It is also the only one of the Ten Commandments that promises a

reward — “that your days on the land will be lengthened” and “so that it goes well with you.” You will have a long-lived civilization and things will go well with you when parents have moral authority.

Beginning in the ’60s, parents stopped telling their children what to do and instead began asking them to do things. Parents became much more interested in being loved by their children than in being honored by their children. Children stopped fearing parents, and parents began fearing their children. Parents became much more interested in their children’s feelings than in their behavior.

Today, elementary schools and high schools work to diminish all parental authority. The most obvious example is hiding from parents that their 10-year-old says he or she is not their biological sex. And should a parent tell his or her 10-year-old, “This is not so, you were born a boy and you are a boy” or “You were born a girl and you are a girl,” those parents run the risk of having the child taken away from them, not to mention severe condemnation from doctors, psychotherapists and social workers.

One result of the breakdown of parental authority is that we probably have more child-parent alienation than at any time in American history. There are millions of parents whose adult child will not talk to them — many of them because of the way the parent voted (if the parent voted for former President Donald Trump, not if the parent voted for Hillary Clinton or President Joe Biden).

The bottom line is this: when parents don’t rule the home, chaos will rule society. And chaos always breeds tyranny. So, the choice is stark — either we have strong parents, or we will have a strong state.

Is it about time for Jesus to come back?

By Joseph Farah

Jesus told us that no one knows the day or hour that He will return. That's a given. But he gives us a framework that tells us a lot. Those closest to the Lord during his ministry asked Him what it would be like – and when.

"Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" they asked in Matthew 24:3. Later, after he had risen, he was asked again. He said in Acts 1:7: "And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."

But Jesus answered differently in Matthew, saying in verses 7-14: "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

Iniquity will abound, and the love of many shall wax cold. Think about it.



What does iniquity mean from God's point of view? Lawlessness. God instructed us to follow His laws – His Torah, His Commandments. What happens when we miss the mark? We all miss the mark sometimes. But from the beginning, He gave us sincere repentance to cure it. And He gave us His Son on the cross who took our sins away if we committed our life to Him and really meant it. But if your love waxes cold toward your neighbor, that's not good – that's double trouble. If by now you don't know His rules, you better learn them – from the good Bible.

We live in a time when many believe we're close to seeing Jesus coming back.

Why? Look at the next clue Jesus gives, in Matthew 24:15. "When ye therefore

shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand.)" What? The holy place? Who's Daniel the prophet?

Read Daniel's book of the Bible. It's one of the best reads in the world. Pay close attention to chapter 12. In it he's told by the angel Michael about the end times, just before the Messiah comes again to be our King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He's told that He comes at the end of a three and a half year period, which is known as the period of Jacob's trouble – which is another name for Israel's trouble. It comes at a time still in the future when the Holy Temple of God will be rebuilt and the daily sacrifice will be taken away and the abomination of desolation shall take place. Israel is our time clock for the end times.

At this point I must tell you about another amazing story, one about Rabbi Judah Ben Samuel who lived during the 12th century and consecrated his life to God. He wrote the following prophecy in A.D. 1217, which has so far proven to be accurate with only the final part of it remaining to be fulfilled:

"When the Ottomans conquer Jerusalem they will rule over Jerusalem for eight jubilees. Afterwards Jerusalem will become no-man's land for one jubilee, and then in the ninth jubilee it will once again come back into the possession of the Jewish nation – which would signify the beginning of the Messianic end time."

When he was asked where he received this prophecy, he said, "The prophet Elijah, who will precede the Messiah, appeared to me and revealed many things to me and emphasized that the pre-condition for answered prayer is that it is fueled by enthusiasm and joy for the greatness and holiness of God."

The first part of his prophecy was fulfilled exactly 300 years later when the Ottomans took control of Jerusalem in 1517.

The second part was fulfilled 400 years later in 1917 when the Ottomans lost control of Jerusalem 400 years later, which equals eight jubilees because the year of jubilee occurs every 50th year (Leviticus 25:1-12). The Ottomans lost Jerusalem to the British on Sept. 17, 1917.

The third part was fulfilled during the next 50 years, from 1917 to 1967 when Jerusalem was known as a no-man's land.

The fourth part was fulfilled on June 7, 1967, when Israel took control of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War, which was exactly 50 years after the Ottomans lost it in 1917. Israel has maintained control ever since then. Since that time, over half the world's Jews have lived in Israel. Many more are destined to come.

That's amazing don't you think?

There's more. Luke's gospel records the time of Israel's trouble this way, in 21:24: "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." [Emphasis

added.] That means no more Gentiles calling the shots. Israel will be, once again, for Israelis.

In case you haven't heard, Israel is already facing increasing pressure from the international community to divide Jerusalem, giving the eastern half to the Palestinians.

Nevertheless, President Donald Trump defied the world on Dec. 6, 2017, and formally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and stated that the U.S. Embassy would be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. He made good on the broken promises of many past presidents by placing the embassy in Jerusalem on May 14, 2018.

Getting back to Judah Ben Samuel's prophecy, you may think he got the fifth part of his prediction wrong because it has been 55 years since 1967.

Messiah Jesus said in Matthew 24:34, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

Based on what King David wrote in Psalm 90:10, one generation is 70 or 80 years.

"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; (70 years) and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years (80 years), yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

If the Messianic end times began in 1967, using King David's definition would put the end in 2037 (70 years) or 2047 (80 years). And he's favored by God.

"Whoso readeth, let him understand." Jesus is waiting for the Gentiles' time to be fulfilled.

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Santa will visit Round Table Books 11-12:30 on Dec. 3; Phoenix Finds 11-12:30 Dec. 10; and Compass Point 11-

12:30 Dec. 17.

A Nutcracker Storytime will be held at Paper June, 927 N Kansas Ave, on Dec. 3. This free event share the magic of The Nutcracker with your little ones! Ballet Midwest is celebrating its 46th year performing The Nutcracker in Topeka. This year, some of their ballerinas will read The Nutcracker and perform small parts from their upcoming ballet. Kids will get to meet the ballerinas and take photos



with them! Call (785) 408-1878 for details.

Fall life drawing sessions are now open. Sessions are held on two Thursday evenings per month (Dec. 8 & 15) from 6-8pm at Redbud Park Pavilion. Enjoy an evening of drawing and socializing with other artists. These sessions provide a live model, wine, cheese, and conversation. Class size is limited to 15. Bring your own supplies, easels are provided. Advance admission tickets are \$20, day of class tickets are \$25. Call (785) 408-8996

First Wednesday (Dec. 7) Speak Easy Poets Open Mic is at ArtsConnect at 909 N Kansas Ave. All levels are welcome. Sign up begins at 6:30pm and readings begin at 7:00pm.

First Friday Art Walk & Market is the first Friday of every month. The North Topeka Arts District has become an attraction to Art Lovers and History Buffs alike with beautiful scenes of art and history. Entertainment can also be found on First Fridays, at various venues during the artwalk up and down N. Kansas Avenue, as well as streetside vendors. The restaurants, locally owned shops, art galleries, antiques and studios have become a favorite art walk destination.

Art Walk Hours are 10 am to 9 pm. You can visit the NOTO Arts Center to pick up a map of participating businesses and view the newest exhibit at the Morris Gallery.

Missed out on NOTO First Friday? Visit 3rd Friday's NOTO Night Out!

Visit NOTO every 1st and 3rd Saturday, 10am-3pm through October for the NOTO Saturday Market.

Various local vendors will be available exhibiting: art, antiques, furniture, and handmade wares.

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CONCERTS

KANSAS PRAIRIE PICKERS – Fourth Sun. ea. Month, 1pm, Auburn Community Center. Foot-stomping, hand-clapping tunes. Concessions available

THE BERRYTON PICKERS – First Sat. of ea. month, 7-9pm, Beryton Baptist Church. Bring snacks, have fun!

GRAND OTTAWA OPRY – 2nd & 4th Saturday, 5:30PM-pre-show, 6PM showtime, Ottawa Memorial

Auditorium, 301 S Hickory, Ottawa. Tickets are \$15 and only at the door. Ph. 785-241-6762, email grandotopr@gmail.com

PLATINUM EXPRESS – Dec. 3, 7pm, The Vinewood. Doors open at 6. Cash bar & snacks available! Tickets: \$10 at the door or at thehistoricvinewood.com. 785.260.6772

PARADIZE BAND – Dec. 9, 7pm, The Vinewood. Doors open at 6. Cash bar & snacks available! Tickets: \$10 at the door or at thehistoricvinewood.com. 785.260.6772

HOLIDAY CONCERT – Dec. 10, 2pm, First Lutheran Church, 1234 SW Fairlawn Rd. Topeka Acappella Unlimited Chorus with special guest Journey Women's Quartet. Tickets at acappellaunlimited.com

MARK & THE SHARKS – Dec. 10, 7pm, The Vinewood. Doors open at 6. Cash bar & snacks available! Tickets: \$10 at the door or at thehistoricvinewood.com. 785.260.6772

TASTE OF CHRISTMAS CONCERT – Dec. 10, 2pm, First Lutheran Church, 1234 SW Fairlawn. Topeka Acappella Unlimited women's barbershop Chorus performs. Tickets \$20, available at acappellaunlimited.com

STEVE KILE – Dec. 16, 7pm, The Vinewood. Doors open at 6. Cash bar & snacks available! Tickets: \$10 at the door or at thehistoricvinewood.com. 785.260.6772

SARA EVANS CHRISTMAS CONCERT – Dec. 18, Stormont Vail Events Ctr. stormontvailventscntr.com

THE KREADY HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR – Dec. 23, 6:30pm, TPAC. Benefit show for TPAC is for the whole family.

BOP DADDIES NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY – Dec. 31, 7pm, The Vinewood. Doors open at 6. Cash bar & snacks available! Tickets: \$10 at the door or at thehistoricvinewood.com. 785.260.6772

SPECIAL CHURCH EVENTS

SENIOR FIT & FUN PROGRAM – every Mon., Wed., & Fri., 1:30pm, Rolling Hills Christian Church, 4530 NW Hiawatha Place (US Hwy 75 & NW 46th St.) 785-286-0601 or office@rhctopeka.org

HARVESTER'S PROGRAM FOR SENIOR CITIZENS – every second Sat., takes place at Christian Lord Ministries, 2421 SE California. Call 266-4979.

HOPE HOUSE FREE COMMUNITY CLOTHING BANK – Wed. 6-8pm and Sat. 12-3pm, Oakland Church of the Nazarene: 939 NE Oakland

HARVESTER FREE MOBILE FOOD DISTRIBUTION – 2nd Saturday each month, 1:30-3pm, Oakland Church of the Nazarene: 939 NE Oakland

FREE WEEKLY COMMUNITY PANCAKE BREAKFAST – Sundays 8:10 to 10:30am, at Oakland Church of the Nazarene: 939 NE Oakland, followed by church services at 10:45am with Pastor Jeanette Cook.

FIRST SATURDAY BREAKFAST BUFFET – 7:30 AM – 10:00 AM, Shawnee Heights UMC, 6020 SE 44th

INSIDE OUT FELLOWSHIP CHURCH – Every Sunday 12pm service; Every Tuesday 7:30pm service. Location: 2020 SE 21st. For info: 785-380-7031 or io@insideoutinc.net or www.insideoutinc.net

NATIVITIES AND NOELS – Dec. 2 and 3, 10 a.m. to 9

p.m.; Dec. 4, 1 to 7 p.m., Topeka Stake Center of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2401 S.W. Kingsrow Rd. 850 nativities from around the world, ongoing live Christmas music, refreshments, nativity craft for children. Christmas music program at 7 p.m. on Saturday includes choirs from Westminster Presbyterian Church, New Hope and Love Community Church, West Side Christian Church, and area Latter-day Saint congregations. Free. For info: call 785-554-8068 or go to <https://www.facebook.com/nativitiesandnoels>

CHRISTMAS BAZAAR – Dec. 3, 11-1, 2245 SW Eveningside Dr. Cookie/Candy Walk (priced per pound), Baked Goods, Crafts & other items for sale, Theme Baskets to bid on. Soup Luncheon available for purchase

CHRISTMAS MOVIE & KARAOKE – Dec. 16, Kansas Avenue UMC, 1029 N. Kansas Ave.

BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE – Dec. 17, 2pm, Grace UMC, 2627 SW Western. A service of remembrance and hope.

BISHOP JAMES MURUNGA – Dec. 18, 10:30am, Harvest Fellowship Church. Murunga is presiding Bishop of Grace Community Fellowship Center in Kenya, as well as National Chairman of Churches Together Consortium.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE – Dec. 24, 1pm, Oakland United Methodist Church, 801 N.E. Chester Ave.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE – Dec. 24, 3pm, Kansas Avenue United Methodist Church, 1020 N. Kansas Ave.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE – Dec. 24, 6:30pm, Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene, 3501 SW Wanamaker Rd. Info: 785-273-2248, office@wnnaz.org, wnnaz.org

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE – Dec. 24, 4pm, Candlelight service at 6:30pm, Crestview UMC, 2245 SW Eveningside Dr.

CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICE – Dec. 25, 10:30am, Wanamaker Woods Church of the Nazarene, 3501 SW Wanamaker Rd. Info: 785-273-2248,


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WATCH NIGHT NEW YEAR'S EVE SERVICE – Dec. 31, 4pm, Kansas Avenue United Methodist Church, 1029 N. Kansas Ave.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY EVENTS

SENIORS NUTRITIONAL LUNCH – Weekdays, except holidays, at noon at Auburn Civic Center, 1020 N. Washington Street. Minimal cost per person. Reservations/cancellations required 24 hours in advance by calling Meals on Wheels of Jefferson & Shawnee Co. at 295-3980. Each meal includes 1% milk & sugar-free items for diabetics. 215-0064.

TOPEKA TWILIGHT LIONS BRANCH CLUB – 3rd Thursdays at 7pm, check Facebook page for location. Topekalions.org

TOPEKA LIONS CLUB – 1st Mondays at Noon at Wings, Etc. Come at 11:30 to order from the menu. Guests welcome.

MEDICARE MONDAYS – First Mon. ea. month, 1-3pm. Topeka/Sh. Co. Public Library, 1515 SW 10th. Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging offers Senior health insurance counseling. For info: 580-4545 or nhonl@tscl.org

SHEPHERDS CENTER PICKLEBALL GROUP – plays Mon. & Wed. Mon. at Countryside UMC, 32nd & Burlingame, from 3-5. Park on the NORTH side & use the furthest WEST door. Follow the hallway to gym. On Wed. at First Baptist, 30th & MacVicar, from 1-3. Park on the WEST side.

TOPEKA SWING DANCE LESSONS – Tuesdays, 7-8:45pm, no partner required, Jayhawk Theatre, 720 SW Jackson. <http://jayhawktheatre.org/events>

COUNTRY AND BALLROOM DANCING – Thursdays 6-9pm. Croco Hall. Info: Edwina 379-9538, 478-4760.

FIRST FRIDAY ART MARKET – Downtown and NOTO arts district. Arts, antiques, fine crafts, flea market items, snacks, beverages, entertainment and more.

TOPEKA ACAPPELLA UNLIMITED AUDITIONS – Topeka Acappella Unlimited is looking for female singers who would like to sing four-part acappella harmonies. Topeka Acappella Unlimited is a Chapter of Sweet Adelines, International. Call Cindy Patton at 785-640-7403 for info

SQUARE DANCING – Shawnee Swingers has monthly dances and sponsors lessons in the Fall. Call or text 785-845-2357; wesquaredance.com shawneeswingers@gmail.com. On Facebook: Shawnee Swingers Square Dance Club.

HARVESTERS MOBILE FOOD PANTRY, 1st & 3rd Sat, 2-3pm, Shawnee Heights UMC parking lot.

TERRITORIAL CAPITAL MUSEUM – Now Open, 640 E Woodson, Leocompton. (785) 887-6148 www.lecomptonkansas.com historiclecompton@gmail.com

FREE MOBILE FOOD DISTRIBUTION – 4th Tue. through Nov., 9am, 1231 NW Eugene St. Randel Ministries, Inc., in partnership with Harvesters and Family of God Church will have its monthly food distribution. No ID or proof of income required, first come first served. Distributing fresh produce and other items to families in need. 785-234-1111 www.RandelMinistries.com

TOPEKA PUBLIC LIBRARY PLAY BUS – 9:30am-noon, Lakeview Nazarene Church, 2835 Croco. Every Tuesday, enjoy story time, play opportunities, books for check-out & take & make art. 785-266-3247.

HOPE AND HEALING ACADEMY harnesses the power of horses to transform the human spirit. They are expanding services to address the needs and experiences of first responders and members of the armed forces. For info, call 785-224-4232 or go to www.hopeandhealingacademy.com.

OPEN INDOOR COURT PICKLEBALL – Sundays at 4pm, Berryton United Methodist Church (7010 SE Berryton Rd. All ages and abilities welcome.

SENIORS PITCH CLUB – Every Tuesday 1 pm at Garfield Community Center. First visit free then a dollar per visit for coffee and replacement cards

BREAD BASKET FARMERS MARKET – Sat., 7:30am-1pm, through Nov. 19, south end of West Ridge Mall.

DEC. CYCLING EVENTS – Various cycle rides are offered by Kansas Cyclist. www.kansascyclist.com/

DEC. OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

– Outdoor events and activities. www.getoutdoorskansas.org/calendar

ICE SKATING – Daily through Jan. 29, 11am-9pm, Every Plaza downtown. 5 skate sessions each day: 11am-12:30pm, 1-2:30pm, 3pm-4:30pm, 5pm-6:30pm, 7pm-8:30pm. For info: dylan.tyler@spectrapp.com. Tickets: <https://www.simplix.com/e/the-corefirst-ice-rink-tickets-118216>

270 CHRISTMAS TREES & ORNAMENT DISPLAY – Nov. 1-Jan. 7, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat., & 1-5pm Sun. at Territorial Capital Museum, 640 E. Woodson, Leocompton. Over 170 Christmas Trees decorated in antique, Victorian, vintage and theme décor – including turn of the century and WW II era decorations, a barb-wire tree and feather trees. Also tour Constitution Hall, a National Landmark 785-887-6148. lecomptonkansas.com

TARC'S WINTER WONDERLAND – Nov. 23-Dec. 31, 6-10pm. Lake Shawnee, 3435

SE East Edge Rd. View dazzling holiday light displays, featuring one million lights, while winding through a 2-mile scenic drive. Advanced Tickets are available: TARC, 2701 SW Randolph. 785.506-8720

GARY'S BERRIES - FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS – Nov. 25 through December, at 5991 17th Street, Grantville, KS 66429, off of Highway 24. Christmas characters such as Santa and the Grinch, nearly one million lights, plenty of food items (like fudge, donuts, kettle corn and more), shopping and more. It also tells the story of "The Greatest Gift," as in the story of Christ. <https://garysfarmfest.com> or call (785) 246-0800.

FESTIVAL OF TREES – Nov. 22 - Dec. 3, 10-6, Fair-lawn Plaza. Features trees & wreaths beautifully decorated by talented designers. silent auction and Sweet Shoppe featuring fabulous homemade treats. For info: www.silfestivaloftrees.com

CHRISTMAS MARKET – Dec. 1-3, 10am-6pm, God's Storehouse

MIRACLE ON KANSAS AVENUE PARADE – Dec. 3, 6-8pm, Downtown Topeka. Lighted parade at 5th & Kansas. www.topekpartnership.com/gtp-events

TOP CITY DAY OUT – Dec. 3, 10-3, Stormont Vail Events Ctr. Come shop snacks, beauty, health, home goods, decor, gifts, local businesses, clothing, jewelry, and more! Many booths will be offering free samples or pampering services. Admission is a \$2 donation for Project Linus For every booth you make a purchase with, you will receive a ticket. There will be a gift basket with items donated from our vendors up for grabs! Also, the first 100 families in the door will receive a goodie bag loaded with coupons and samples from our vendors.

HOLIDAY CRAFT SHOW – Dec. 3, 9-3, Crestview Community Ctr, 4801 SW Shunga Dr. Features up to 50 vendor booths with hand-made gift items. Admission: Free

BREAKFAST WITH SANTA – Dec. 3, 8:30am-12,



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10:30am**

Harvest Family Fellowship Church
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Topeka, KS



Bishop James W. Murunga and wife Maria

James Murunga serves as presiding Bishop of Grace Community Fellowship Center Kenya, overseeing a network of 40+ churches within GCF. He also is National Chairman of Churches Together Consortium that brings together over thirty church organizations with the aim of advancing God's Kingdom in the various societal spheres. James serves in prophetic and apostolic spheres of ministry. His passion is to see the church of Christ walk in kingdom unity, and villages, cities, regions and entire nations come to the Knowledge of Jesus Christ, worshipping Him in Spirit and Truth. He and wife Maria have three boys and one daughter. Maria is an anciented Prophetic Psalmist and serves in community empowerment forums.

For more info, contact the church at 785-232-3939.



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When Christmas giving is smart and when it isn't

xxxWith the Christmas season upon us, thoughts are turning to the matter of gifts and giving. Such matters generally invoke joy in people of all ages, but not always. Sometimes we give the wrong things to the wrong people, and sometimes we give for the wrong reasons. And while many Christians lament the fact that gifts and giving can distract our focus from “the real reason for the season,” that’s an issue for another article—and one that relates, thankfully, to everyone’s free will and personal choice.

The origin of Christmas is, of course, the birth of Jesus Christ. It is therefore more than a little appropriate to ask, “What did Jesus say about gifts and giving?”

Whatever your faith or denomination may be, or even if you have chosen neither, you are likely aware in a general way that Jesus encouraged giving. You probably know that he spoke favorably of giving to the poor—though not because he disapproved of wealth or the wealthy per se (sorry, socialists) but for the rather obvious reason that the wealthy don’t need material gifts.

What would we think of Jesus if he had advised, “Give your charitable dollars to those with the largest bank accounts?” We would probably think he was as crazy as if he had urged, “Give your charitable dollars to the government.” And if he inquired of a large audience today, “What did you do for the poor?” I think he would be appalled to hear a response such as, “We voted for the politicians who said they would take care of that.”

However, something Jesus said in Matthew 5:42 (also recorded in Luke 6:30) deserves careful attention. It is often cited by critics of Christianity as proof that Jesus spoke nonsense about gifts and giving.

Let me explain.

A few days ago, I delivered a lecture at a very good Students for Liberty conference in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. My subject? “Was Jesus a Socialist?,” the title of my most recent book. I argued that nothing in his teachings remotely endorsed the ethics or the economics of a centrally planned economy, coercive redistribution of wealth, envy or vilification of the successful, the throttling of profit-motivated enterprise, mandatory communal equality, or government ownership of the means of production. From a young Objectivist (follower of Ayn Rand) whom I know and respect came this question: “But what about Matthew 5:42 in which Jesus said, ‘Give to him who asks you,

and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away?’”

The implication? Jesus was either a socialist or a nutjob, or both. Taken literally, he seems to be advocating the indefensible. Giving anything and everything to anybody who simply asks for it is a sure-fire prescription for evil outcomes. One would quickly lose everything, much of it to bad people who would put the proceeds to some very bad purposes. And the sucker who gave it to them wouldn’t even be able to care for himself and his own family.

Was Jesus really telling us to go bankrupt? Was he advising us to be terrible stewards of our wealth by giving even to the underserving, the slothful, the degenerate, the thieving, and the deceitful? Did he honestly suggest that self-sacrifice for any conceivable purpose is a virtue, even if it runs counter to the values we hold to be true and noble? Would he approve if you knowingly allowed others to take financial advantage of you?

To respond affirmatively to these questions is to denigrate the real Jesus in the service of some earthly ideology or animosity. It depicts him as a cartoon character we can smugly dismiss.

A single sentence interpreted out of context or without regard to the speaker’s full perspective is always a license for mischief. It can easily lead to false or incomplete assumptions and erroneous conclusions.

For example, Ayn Rand once wrote, “The man who does not value himself, cannot value anything or anyone.” Oh really? That, in isolation, is a remarkably sweeping and categorical statement. It is not hard for me to imagine a man of the lowest personal esteem still placing some value on his lunch, or his shoes, or at least his therapist. We would not be fair to Rand if we failed to consider what she really meant, if we did not allow her some license to employ a literary device to make a point.

Rand also wrote, “When I die, I hope to go to heaven—whatever that is—and I want to be able to afford the price of admission.” Should we leap to the conclusion that Rand believed in heaven after all? Of course not, because we know that

she didn’t.

Sometimes Rand is misunderstood as an opponent of charitable giving, so intensely selfish that she couldn’t countenance one person doing a good thing for another. Her hero in *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt, tells Dagny Taggart, “I’ll warn you now that there is one word which is forbidden in this valley: the word ‘give.’”

But her hero in *The Fountainhead*, Howard Roark, generously pays the mortgage of his friend, the sculptor Steven Mallory, and also pays for their meals together. What Rand opposed (as do I) was both the ethic and the “public policy” of forcing one to sacrifice his val-



ues for the benefit of another. Agree with her or not, we should at least consider her ideas in full and in context. The same goes for Jesus.

Rand was right on so many things (I wish I could get Objectivists to admit that Jesus was too) but she could also be personally officious, wildly paranoid, judgmental, and intolerant. (See economist Murray Rothbard’s essay for details.) She made, for example, indefensible statements about Native Americans, even denying that any of them ever possessed or recognized property rights, but that doesn’t prompt many Objectivists to reject her outright.

When Jesus said, “Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away,” was he advocating some kind of socialism? Silly question. Socialism involves the concentration of earthly political power and the use of state coercion to achieve certain objectives. Jesus did not invoke the state in any way in this passage. He never endorsed compulsory giving at sword-point. Whatever you think it was that he was calling for, it was to be a personal choice, not a state function. If he had said, “Go plant a tree,” we would hardly be justified to infer he favored government-run

collective farms.

So, then the remaining issue is his sanity. How could anyone call for something as insanely stupid as self-destruction at the behest of the whims or greed of another? Jesus didn’t.

Considering once again both context and the fullness of his teachings, it would be the height of foolishness to adopt a strictly literal view of Matthew 5:42 as a definitive verdict. That, at best, would be a “straw man” argument. To assume he was a goofy “absolutist” on gifts and giving runs afoul of other statements he or his closest disciples made throughout the Gospels.

Jesus asserts in Matthew 7:10, for example, that a good father would never give a serpent to a child (even if the child asks for it). In 2 Thessalonians 3:10, the Apostle Paul urged a rule that would revolutionize modern welfare: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” In 1 Timothy 5:8, Paul condemns the able-

bodied who refuse to provide for their own families, which of course one cannot do if he gives everything away to whoever wants it.

The most reasonable inference one can draw from Matthew 5:42 is that Jesus was encouraging generosity from the heart—not blind, indiscriminate, self-destructive giving that would defeat the purpose of giving in the first place, but wise stewardship and philanthropy that produces actual, positive outcomes.

I am unaware of an Objectivist food pantry, soup kitchen, orphanage, hospital or blood drive but I would welcome any one of them should one ever spring up. Meantime, I am grateful that people, often of faith, are starting and managing such worthy causes every day. The world would be a darker place without them. Actions speak louder than lectures. And I know that Objectivists are not opposed to gifts and giving because I get solicitations from their organizations requesting gifts of cash all the time.

Gifts and giving are an alternative—indeed, an antidote—to the compulsory, false charity of the welfare state. If you inherited a million dollars and decided to help the deserving needy with it, the last thing you would likely do is cut a check

to a government welfare department. Not even socialists and welfare statisticians do that; just check the “Donations” line in the federal budget if you have a microscope.

Countless acts of voluntary, joyful, charitable giving avoid the wasteful expense of a government middleman. They prevent the demagogue from buying votes with other people’s money. They animate the spirit of Christmas 365 days of the year. If you’re looking for evidence of how Christians—their enterprise, their determination and yes, their generosity—improved life, see Alvin J. Schmidt’s remarkable book (also included in the recommended readings at the bottom of this article).

When you give of your own resources, you tend to expect some change in whatever bad behavior may have contributed to the problems a needy person faces. If a charity proves to be ineffective or corrupt, its donors vanish; when the welfare department squanders public money and perpetuates social problems across generations, it usually gets more tax revenue.

Giving to a worthy cause, such as helping the needy, is often an expression of love—and who can make a credible case that the world already has all the love it needs?

A charitable people recognize that this world is far from perfect, that circumstances require action to prevent harm, relieve distress, and rebuild lives. The single best way to do that is to foster a free economy that inherently out-produces goods and opportunities beyond anything socialists can even dream of. The problems that will inevitably remain are ripe for resolution through heart-felt, charitable giving. A smart people understand that expecting government to get that job done well is a pipe dream.

If Jesus was urging us to dig as deep as it takes to help the deserving get back on their feet—a fair inference from Matthew 5:42—I must say that’s far better advice than doing nothing or waiting for the politicians to do it. I think many Objectivists might even agree with that.

If you choose to give this Christmas season, be thoughtful about it. Give wisely. Give lovingly. Give generously. Give from the heart. Give to people and causes that will make the world a better place. It may be the Christian thing to do, but it’s also the right thing to do regardless of faith or denomination.

—By Lawrence Reed / Foudation for Economic Education

A 'postdenominational' era? The rise of nondenominational churches



Pastor Dan Haugh welcomed 21 new members to his congregation Sunday morning. Six months ago, he welcomed 19 others to Stowe Community Church in Stowe, Vermont.

While other houses of worship in Northern Vermont are shrinking, this nondenominational church has grown more than 80% since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

On the other end of the country in Spokane, Washington, Faith Bible Church — another nondenominational congregation — has seen an 18% uptick in worshippers since January, and during the pandemic had enough newcomers to plant two new churches.

"We're definitely experiencing growth," said Faith Bible Church Teaching Pastor Dan Jarms. "I think some of it is rebound, people coming back who were staying away, but we've had a lot of new growth."

About 800 people fill the sanctuary there on Sunday mornings.

Between 2010 and 2020 nondenominational churches expanded by 2 million attendees and 9,000 congregations in the U.S., according to the 2020 U.S. Religion Census, which was released last week. The USRC is released every 10 years by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies.

Nondenominational churches now make up 4% of the U.S. population and constitute the third-largest religious group in the country after Catholics and the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Catholic Church has more than 61 million adherents, and the Southern Baptist Convention has the most congregations, with 51,000.

This boom in nondenominational churches is not surprising to Scott Thumma, director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, who started studying the religion in the late 90s.

"I saw that nondenominationalism was growing and none of my colleagues were paying much attention to them," he said.

Thumma grew up in an independent Baptist church and said over the years he's attended other independent congregations and studied megachurches.

"I knew they were similar but also different from the typical evangelical church," he said. "I also was certain that they would continue to grow rapidly, and this congregational identity would become more popular over time due to the increasing individualism of American society."

He explained that a nondenominational church is one that chooses not to affiliate with an official denomination. He said nondenominationalism is individualism at the congregational level.

Though most nondenominational churches identify as evangelical, Thumma notes that there are theological differences among independent congregations. Some are more progressive than others, for instance.

Also, nondenominational church buildings tend to be larger in terms of

seating capacity. Leadership is predominantly male, younger and less educated, with 30% having a Master of Divinity degree, compared to 47% of evangelical clergy.

Meanwhile, those in the pews at nondenominational churches are younger and tend to have more college degrees than those in an evangelical church.

Thumma said nondenominational churches are also more racially diverse.

"This multiracial reality is an intentional commitment for many of the nondenominational churches," he explained, noting that when surveyed in the FACT study 48% of congregations "strongly agreed" they were striving to be diverse racially, ethnically and socially, compared to 21% of denominational evangelical churches.

Thumma said in his research he also found many denominational churches beginning to pull away from their affiliations.

"This rise in those congregations overtly asserting independence is only the tip of the iceberg. I contend that a large number of denominationally affiliated churches have also become functionally nondenominational," he said.

According to a 2015 FACT survey, 2.3% of churches reported they had become independent in the previous 10 years, and another 0.5% had "seriously considered it."

"That is over 8,000 becoming nondenominational and almost 2,000 more considering the switch," Thumma ex-

plained.

He said this is largely because decisions about resources, literature, educational materials, worship music, mission, what to support and other issues are increasingly being made at the local level rather than through denominational headquarters.

He calls this the post-denominational era and says the ground is eroding for denominational identities.

The census data might confirm his speculations, as many traditions are declining in membership, like the United Methodist Church and the Southern Baptists, both of which fell by about 2 million adherents from 2010 to 2020.

This story was originally published by Religion Unplugged.

—Tracy Simmons is an award-winning journalist specializing in religion reporting and digital entrepreneurship.

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For first time since the Dark Ages, Christians are a minority in England

Christians are now a minority in England and Wales. The startling revelation comes from the most recent census figures and marks the first time since the 7th century in the midst of the “Dark Ages.”

The data of the 2021 census, released Tuesday by the Office for National Statistics revealed, is stirring debate over the future of the country and Europe as a whole.

Just 46.2% of the population of England and Wales described themselves as Christian on the day of the 2021 census, down from 59.3% a decade earlier. The Muslim population grew from 4.9% to 6.5% of the population, while 1.7% identified as Hindu, up from 1.5%. More than 1 in 3 people — 37% — said they had no religion, up from 25% in 2011.

The other parts of the U.K., Scotland and Northern Ireland, report their census results separately.

Secularists are cheering the news



saying religion plays too large a role in society, pointing out the government still funds religious schools. Plus, say, the monarch also sits as the head of the national church.

Andrew Copson, chief executive of the charity Humanists U.K., said “the dramatic growth of the non-religious” had made the U.K. “al-

most certainly one of the least religious countries on Earth.”

“One of the most striking things about these results is how at odds the population is from the state itself,” he said. “No state in Europe has such a religious set-up as we do in terms of law and public policy, while at the same time having such a non-religious population.”

Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell, one of the most senior clerics in the Church of England, said the data was “not a great surprise,” but was a challenge to Christians to work harder to promote their faith.

“We have left behind the era when many people almost automatically identified as Christian, but other surveys consistently show how the same people still seek spiritual truth and wisdom and a set of values to live by,” he said.

Some see opportunity in the results

Lt. Col. Dean Pallant, spokesman for the Salvation Army’s U.K. territory, said the decline of Christian identification offers an opportunity for the movement, which began in 1865 as an evangelical outreach in East London’s slums.

“We need to rethink the way we explain the good news of Jesus in our society,” Pallant says. “The traditional evangelical methods don’t work as they once did. People often don’t even know the story of the gospel, so we have to rethink this with humility.”

Pallant said the Salvation Army’s traditional open-air street meet-

ings, combining brass music with gospel testimonies, no longer work in a society where the Christian story isn’t known. Instead, he said, “People have to go on a much longer journey to become disciples of Jesus.”

In spite of the drop in Christian identity, Archbishop Cottrell says that the Church would continue to be there for the nation in times of need.

“This winter – perhaps more so than for a long time – people right across the country, some in desperate need, will be turning to their local church, not only for spiritual hope but practical help,” he said.

“We will be there for them, in many cases, providing food and warmth. And at Christmas millions of people will still come to our services.

“At the same time, we will be looking beyond our immediate surroundings, remembering we are part of a global faith, the largest movement on Earth and its greatest hope for a peaceful, sustainable future.”

The religion question in the census is voluntary, which the ONS said was answered by 94 per cent of residents, an increase from 92.9 per cent in 2011.



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5 tips to prep your home for cold, wet conditions

Americans should brace for a potentially cold and wet winter, according to NOAA and this year's Farmer's Almanac Winter Outlook. That means now is a perfect opportunity to think about preparing your family and home for the colder months ahead.

From heating homes with a high-performing furnace or fireplace to keeping children warm and comfortable on school buses, propane can help keep families cozy this winter.

Relying on a diverse energy mix – including propane, solar and wind – can help ensure you're prepared for whatever winter brings and reduce the strain on the fragile electric grid. Plus, propane is a stable energy source that is stored on-site and can keep homes operating during severe weather or utility power interruptions. Using propane also produces 43% fewer greenhouse gas emissions than an equivalent amount of electricity generated from the grid.

Get winter-ready with these tips from the experts at the Propane Education & Research Council:

Have Your Furnace Serviced. Proactively think about ways you can reduce the demand on your heating system. In addition to scheduling routine maintenance by a trained professional, there are a few things homeowners

can do. First, open all air vents and make sure they are uncovered as blocked airflow forces the furnace to work harder.

Check the thermostat to ensure it's working properly by increasing the temperature by 5 F and waiting to hear the furnace turn on. Consider setting the thermostat a couple degrees cooler than what might feel comfortable as doing so not only saves money but lessens the load from your furnace. Keep thermostats at 65 F during the day and 55 F at night, closing off rooms that don't need to be heated.

Using a programmable thermostat can save homeowners as much as 10% per year on heating costs, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. It's also a good idea to replace air filters every 1-3 months to help keep your furnace working efficiently and effectively.

Upgrade Your Furnace. If it's time to upgrade your home's climate control system, it's a smart idea to do your



homework and explore your options. There are several state and federal incentive programs to help homeowners upgrade their current systems to a clean energy option like propane. Propane is an affordable, comfortable, reliable and efficient energy source. It's also a clean, low-carbon option. What's more, propane-powered furnaces last 50% longer than electric heat pumps, which means a lower lifetime investment. Propane furnaces also provide warmer air than other heat sources (115-125 F), are less impacted by outdoor temperatures and produce 50% fewer greenhouse gas emissions than electric furnaces and 12% less than fuel oil furnaces.

Rethink Your Boiler System. For a home that runs on a boiler system, you can make upgrades that improve performance while providing space savings and the versatility to provide heating, hot water and even snow melt. High-efficiency propane boilers can last up to 30 years and have significantly lower emissions than those fueled by heating oil.

Take Advantage of Your Fireplace. The warm glow of a fire isn't only comforting; it can be a practical and effective way to increase the heat inside your home. Not only do propane fireplaces offer 5-6 times the heating capacity of electric fireplaces, they're also more energy efficient, environmentally friendly, convenient to use and easier to install than woodburning models. They also emit less soot and other emissions.

Be Efficient with water heating. Water heating can be a large expense, accounting for 14-18% of home utility bills.

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Johnny Cash movie: His life, loves, challenges and successes

International superstar; honored by presidents; a jailbird and addict. Singer Johnny Cash knew great highs and great lows. What was The Man in Black's legacy?

1969 saw over six million Cash records sold... more than the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Elvis Presley, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin or any musical act. Johnny packed arenas, had a weekly national television show. Over 70 of his TV guests made either the Rock and Roll or Country Music Hall of Fame.

Just two years before, depression had prompted him to attempt suicide. Popping pills – nearly 100 daily at one point – made a mess of important relationships. His first marriage crumbled; financial problems hounded him. June Carter, the woman he loved, refused to marry him until he kicked drugs. He felt lonely, abandoned, worthless, hopeless. Amphetamines, barbiturates, and alcohol medicated his pain.

What happened in those two years? A new movie explores his multiple journeys of overcoming. Based on Greg Laurie's book of the same name, Johnny



Cash: The Redemption of an American Icon is a documentary featuring his life, loves, music and personal challenges.

One sad day in 1967, Johnny entered a deep cave near Chattanooga, crawled for hours and lay down, intending to die there. Lying in that dark cave – his flashlight battery dead – he said he felt God prompting him to get up and exit. So he crawled for hours in the darkness until he saw light leading to the way out. Upon emerging, he promised June he would put his life in God's hands.

In 1969, Johnny reconnected with Jimmie Snow, a country singer he'd known from the early music circuits with Elvis Presley. Snow, once a drug

and alcohol abuser, became a pastor. Eventually, Johnny declared publicly his choice to follow Jesus as his Savior.

Johnny became good friends with Billy Graham and spoke at many Graham events. But a drug relapse put that opportunity on hold temporarily. He sometimes used drugs during his TV show years. He battled his addictions at the Betty Ford Center.

This inspiring film includes music and video of Johnny, plus insights from artists like Wynonna Judd, Sheryl Crow, Alice Cooper, Tim McGraw, Jimmie Allen, Marty Stuart, and Schneider.

Johnny did finish well. June predeceased him. Before he died, he and his first wife Vivian, to whom he'd been unfaithful, visited and made peace with each other.

His tombstone expresses his ultimate goal in life: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, My strength, And my redeemer (Psalm 19:14)."

The movie is in theaters December 5, 6 & 7.

—Rusty Wright

Jeff Kready Returns with Nikki Renée Daniels to Bring Broadway to Topeka

Broadway is coming to Kansas with a new holiday tradition - "The Kready Holiday Spectacular!" Presented by Broadway stars and married couple Jeff Kready and Nikki Renée Daniels, the holiday spectacular will make its debut at The Topeka Performing Arts Center (TPAC) on December 23, 2022. Kready and Daniels, who have performed in 17 Broadway shows, will perform holiday-themed musical numbers with a New York flair and a hometown feel.

"I am thrilled to bring my family home for Christmas," said Jeff Kready, Topeka native and star of Broadway productions "Company," "Tootsie" and "A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder." Kready added, "I grew up on the TPAC stage, so getting to perform there now is a dream come true. For years I've wanted to create something special for Topeka, and after nearly two decades in show business, the stars have aligned, and it's happening this December."

"Topeka feels like a second home-

town to me," said Nikki Renée Daniels, star of Broadway productions "Company," "Hamilton," "Book of Mormon" and others. "As an honorary Topekan, I am so excited to perform at TPAC with my family and to spread some holiday cheer to a town that has always enveloped me in such a warm embrace."

"The Kready Holiday Spectacular" comes on the heels of a boom in Topeka's arts and entertainment scene. The capital city boasts a vibrant and thriving entertainment and nightlife scene - including the art and mural-filled district NOTO Arts and Entertainment District - with live music, food and fun that adds to its historic and lively downtown community.

"Visit Topeka is excited to see the start of a new holiday tradition in the capital city," said Sean Dixon, president of Visit Topeka. "With Topeka's rising status as a diverse and inclusive cultural hub, people across the nation are discovering the



magic and charm of the city. This new show, headlined by two of Broadway's brightest stars, will shine an even bigger spotlight on our arts and entertainment offerings."

The holiday spectacular will include special appearances by local musical groups and personalities such as the Topeka Symphony Orchestra, Shawnee Choral Society and popular radio host Danielle Norwood. Santa Claus himself who will be on hand to take pictures after the concert.

Tickets are available at the TPAC Box Office or online at Ticketmaster via www.topekaperformingarts.org/events

—Nicole Rosky | broadwayworld.com

MercyMe hopes new album will remind Christians of 'one common denominator' amidst divisions



Bart Millard and his MercyMe bandmates began writing some of the songs on their latest album in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, long before the nation was divided over issues that now dominate the headlines.

Millard, though, believes the album's release in 2022 had been God's plan all along. Titled Always Only Jesus, it is the 11th studio album by MercyMe and urges Christians to keep Jesus -- and only Jesus -- at the center of their lives.

Of the album's 10 tracks, about half were written during the pandemic.

"It feels like we just stumbled on to a very important record," Millard told me. "It's perfect timing with an album titled Always Only Jesus when we've got a divided body of Christ that needs to be reminded of the one common denominator we should all have. And so it was definitely a God thing. It was kind of weird."

MercyMe is in the middle of a 19-city fall tour. In December, MercyMe and Chris Tomlin will embark on their joint winter tour.

The album's title track references a Christ-centric theme ("every breath I'm breathing will be filled with praise") as does the album's first radio single, Then Christ Came, which testifies of Jesus' power ("You are the one I was made for"). That latter single is rising on Billboard's Hot Christian Songs and Christian Airplay charts.

"We have friends that have kind of

drawn some pretty harsh lines in the sand and become very passionate about certain things," Millard said, referencing hot-button issues. "... Some of them were like, 'Man, how do we recover from this?'"

Millard said he has seen friendships "severed" during recent years.

"[It's] heartbreaking," he said. "... And now that we're kind of going back to normal, you either have some [people] pretending it never happened, some walking it back or some trying to explain, 'Well, this is why I said this.' ... But the one thing we do know is that we all have to be able to agree that we are still pursuing Jesus."

Millard compares the pandemic-driven divisions to divisions between denominations that are split over tertiary issues.

"I can disagree with you. And it happens a lot. It's why there are so many denominations. We all feel like we're doing our best to honor the heart of God. I'm okay with that. But the big part of that is honoring the heart of God," Millard said. "So we all thought: Doing our part is making an album to remind people that it is about the heart of God, it is about Jesus. If you're gonna address the elephant in the room, you can argue and fight and all that kind of stuff as much as you want. But we have to be able to come together and agree that yes, we are still pursuing Christ."

Visit MercyMe.org.

—Matt Boatwright

Candace Cameron Bure responds in love to critics of her values

Actress Candace Cameron Bure is responding with grace to attacks on her defense of traditional marriage and Christian values.

"I would like to address my comments on Great American Family's programming as reported in 'The Wall Street Journal,'" she said. "All of you who know me know beyond question that I have great love and affection for all people. It absolutely breaks my heart that anyone would ever think I intentionally would want to offend and hurt anyone. It saddens me that the media is often seeking to divide us, even around a subject as comforting and merry as Christmas movies. But given the toxic climate in our culture right now, I shouldn't be surprised. We need Christmas more than ever."

Critics slammed Bure, calling her a bigot and worse. "One Tree Hill" alum Hilary Burton Morgan accused her of embracing bigotry for a payday, and her husband, "The Walking Dead" actor Jeffrey Dean Morgan, joined in the attack as well.

Bure went on to say that her Christian faith meant that she saw the image of God in every human being — whether they agree with her or not — and that all she wanted to do was to bring people together.

"I am called to love all people, and I do," she said. "If you know me, you know that I am a person who loves fiercely and indiscriminately. My heart yearns to build bridges and bring people one step closer to God, to love others well and to simply be a reflection of God's huge love for all of us."

The "Fuller House" star went on to explain that while she loved the opportunity to be a part of faith-based programming at Great American Family, but that it was never her goal to use entertainment to preach.

"The God we serve is a wildly creative and loving God," Bure said. "He didn't just capture a small part of my heart, he has captured all of my heart. He will be reflected in everything I do and say — in my family, my work and my interactions with people from all walks of life, God's love and God's compassion are front and center."

As for her exit from Hallmark — where she'd carved out her niche as the "Queen of Christmas" — Bure said the entertainment brand had become "a



completely different network" than it was when she joined, because of a "change of leadership."

On Dec. 11, Hallmark will debut "The Holiday Sitter," a story about two men falling in love with each other.

While Bure didn't decry Hallmark for anything it's producing, she told the WSJ the focus will be elsewhere for Great American Family, which is debuting 18 Christmas movies this year.

"I think that Great American Family will keep traditional marriage at the core," she said.

When Bure first announced her partnership with GAF in April, she said in a statement she was "very excited to develop heartwarming family and faith-filled programming and make the kind of stories my family and I love to watch."

"[GAF] fits my brand perfectly," she continued. "We share a vision of creating compelling wholesome content for an audience who wants to watch programming for and with the whole family. Great, quality entertainment with a positive message is what my partnership with [GAF] is all about."

Bure said her goal is to strike a balance between faith-focused and family-friendly entertainment that will be appealing to believers and unbelievers alike.

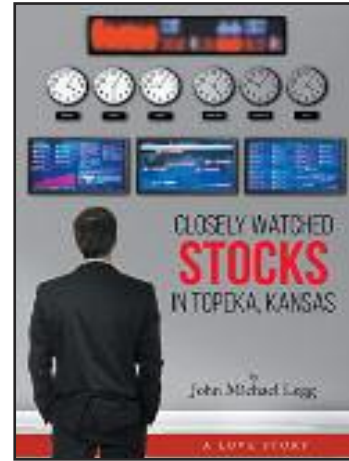
'Closely Watched Stocks in Topeka, Kansas' is a Love Story

John Michael Legg has completed his new book "Closely Watched Stocks in Topeka, Kansas" - an enthralling love story between a stockbroker and a waitress.

Jay discovers, after dating June, that she is not just pretty, but also a very intelligent and well-read woman as well. They make an unlikely couple. With her level of intelligence, he quietly wonders why she is waitressing.

After six months of dating, Jay is called to come to the hospital emergency room late one evening. June is having a severe alcohol-induced pancreatic attack. It is there that Jay learns that June had to leave college in her senior year because she had a terrible alcohol addiction.

Jay moves June into his home, hoping to help her control her drinking, but it doesn't work. June can't quit drinking,



and things get worse from there.

Author John Michael Legg discusses the interesting title of his novel, writing, "'Closely Watched Stocks in Topeka, Kansas,' is what they call a misnomer.

This is not another book about the stock market. The male lead in the book, Jay Sherrer, is a sixty-seven-year-old stockbroker in Topeka, Kansas, and the book starts out in a stock market setting and, at times, the book goes back to the market to earn the title."

Published by Newman Springs Publishing, John Michael Legg's compelling tale follows Jay and June as they struggle to overcome this issue of addiction together.

Readers who wish to experience this inspiring work can purchase "Closely Watched Stocks in Topeka, Kansas" at bookstores everywhere, or online at the Apple iBooks Store, Amazon, or Barnes & Noble.

For additional information, contact Newman Springs Publishing at 732-243-8512.

"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" from Sight & Sound arrives in theaters

Just in time for the Christmas season, Sight & Sound, which operates a theater in Branson, has released its first feature film. "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" tells the compelling true story of the life and faith of the American poet who inspired the Christmas carol of that name.

The film highlights the life of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He wrote the poem "Christmas Bells" in 1863 during the Civil War, and it inspired the holiday



song "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

"It tells the story of the Christmas carol and how it came to be written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who experienced several tragedies throughout his life that

took him down a path of losing faith," said Katie Miller, director of marketing and communications for Sight & Sound. "It really is a story of his rekindled faith on Christmas Eve through a set of circumstances that inspires him to write the poem, 'I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.'"

"I Heard the Bells" is in theaters for a limited time. Ticket information is available at www.iheardthebellsmovie.com/tickets.



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9 tips to fend off holiday stress

The holidays are a time for family and cheer, but making sure the house is clean, the food is ready, and the presents are wrapped and ready to be opened can be overwhelming. These factors can bring unwanted stress and depression in a time meant for happiness.

Some important, practical tips can help minimize the stress that accompanies the holidays. These tips may even help you enjoy the holidays more than expected.

Through the endless parties, cooking, shopping and cleaning, try taking one of 9 steps to ensure you have a stress-free holiday:

1. Plan ahead.

Between co-workers, friends and family, it's inevitable that some commitments will end up on the same day. Make sure to plan on what you can attend in person or virtually. If you're hosting the holidays, create a menu to help you stay organized and make

grocery shopping easier.

2. Say no.

With holiday commitments, it is OK to say no to a few or all of them. It also will help relieve some stress. Try sharing your to-do list with other family members.

3. Plan spending.

The holidays mean spending money. Make a budget and stick to it. Spending money on your loved ones is important, but it's also important to pay your energy bill. Don't buy gifts that you'll be paying off for the rest of the year.

4. Create relaxing surroundings.

Turn on some music, light some candles or open the windows on a sunny day. Research has found that listening to music and the scent of citrus can boost feelings of well-being, and vitamin D is always a happiness booster.

5. Maintain healthy habits.

The holidays are notorious for ruining healthy habits. A short



workout each morning will help your decision-making throughout the day. Encourage your family to try snow shoeing or sledding to get in extra exercise. Eat healthy snacks like fresh fruit or vegetables throughout the season and to fill up before a dinner party or celebration with tempting, but unhealthy, foods.

6. Share feelings.

Spending a holiday after a loss in the family can be difficult. Accept your feelings and open up about them to others. It may make you feel better to share. Try to switch up old traditions to ease the loss.

7. Respect differences.

Family members will have different viewpoints than your own. Try your best to forgive and forget this holiday season. Focus on your similarities, and replace tension with something productive.

8. Be realistic.

You are only one person, and you can only do so much. Be realistic with how much you can handle this season. Forget about perfection, and relax and enjoy the company surrounding you.

9. Take a break.

Don't forget about your own needs. Take a nap, go for a short walk, read a book or watch a funny movie. Laughing relaxes the whole body, and can relieve physical tension and stress.

Holidays are meant to be a fun, enjoyable time with friends and family. These tips can help ensure you truly enjoy your holidays when stress starts to set in.

-Peter Reisner, M.D. is a Family Medicine physician in Chetek, Wisconsin.

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What You Need to Know About Cholesterol



Understanding and improving cholesterol is important for people of all ages, including children and teens. Maintaining healthy cholesterol levels can help keep your heart healthy and lower your chances of getting heart disease or having a stroke.

High cholesterol usually has no symptoms. In fact, about 38% of adults in the United States are diagnosed with high cholesterol, according to the American Heart Association. Understanding what cholesterol is, the role it plays, when to get screened and how to manage it are important aspects of protecting your overall health and prevent a heart attack or stroke.

Understanding Cholesterol

A waxy, fat-like substance created by the liver and consumed from meat, poultry and dairy products, cholesterol isn't inherently bad for you. In fact, your body needs it to build cells and make vitamins and other hormones. However, too much cholesterol circulating in the blood can pose a problem.

The two types of cholesterol are low-density lipoprotein (LDL), which is considered "bad," and high-density lipoprotein (HDL), which can be thought of as "good" cholesterol. Too much of the "bad" kind, or not enough of the "good," increases the risk of cholesterol slowly building up in the inner walls of the arteries that feed the heart and brain.

Cholesterol can join with other substances to form a thick, hard deposit on the inside of the arteries called plaque. This can narrow the arteries and make them less flexible – a condition known as atherosclerosis. If a blood clot forms, it may be more

likely to get stuck in one of these narrowed arteries, resulting in a heart attack or stroke.

Understanding Risk

Your body naturally produces all the LDL it needs. An unhealthy lifestyle can make your body produce more LDL than required. Behaviors that may negatively affect your cholesterol levels include lack of physical activity, obesity, eating an unhealthy diet and smoking or exposure to tobacco smoke.

In addition to unhealthy habits, which are the cause of high LDL cholesterol for most people, some people inherit genes from their parents or grandparents – called familial hypercholesterolemia (FH) – that cause them to have too much cholesterol and can lead to premature atherosclerotic heart disease. If you have a family history of FH or problems related to high cholesterol, it's important to get your levels checked.

Getting Cholesterol Checked

Adults age 20 and older should have their cholesterol and other traditional risk factors checked every 4-6 years as long as their risk remains low. After age 40, your health care professional will use an equation to calculate your 10-year risk of heart attack or stroke. People with cardiovascular disease, and those at elevated risk, may need their cholesterol and other risk factors assessed more often.

Managing Cholesterol

If you have high cholesterol, understanding your risk for heart disease and stroke is one of the most important things you can do, along with taking steps to lower your cholesterol.

Often, simply changing certain behaviors can help bring your numbers into line. Eating a heart-healthy diet that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean or plant-based protein, fish and nuts while limiting red and processed meats, sodium and sugar-sweetened foods and beverages is one of the best ways to lower your cholesterol. While grocery shopping, look for the American Heart Association's Heart-Check mark to help identify foods that can be part of an overall healthy eating pattern.

Other lifestyle changes include losing weight, quitting smoking and becoming more physically active, as a sedentary lifestyle can lower HDL. To help lower both cholesterol and high blood pressure, experts recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise a week, such as walking, biking or swimming.



For some people, lifestyle changes may prevent or manage unhealthy cholesterol levels. For others, medication may also be needed. Work with your doctor to develop a treatment plan that's right for you. If medication is re-

quired, be sure to take it as prescribed.

Controlling your cholesterol may be easier than you think. Learn more about managing your cholesterol at heart.org/cholesterol.

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33-year-old former Chief Justin Houston having good year: 'I just want to glorify God'

A seventh AFC North title in franchise history is in sight for the 2022 Baltimore Ravens.

Yet in order to stay out in front of Cincinnati, last year's AFC representative in the Super Bowl, the Ravens will need edge rusher Justin Houston to continue to perform at a Pro-Bowl level. Despite



missing three games, Houston is tied for second in the entire NFL with 8.5 sacks on the season (becoming the first player in franchise history to record three straight multi-sack games). In fact, he's on pace this season for the second-most sacks in his 12-year career, behind only his remarkable 2014 performance with the Kansas City Chiefs when he amassed 22 sacks to lead the NFL.

Recently on Monday night, Houston and his Ravens teammates frustrated the New Orleans Saints' offense in a 27-13 win, holding them to six points before a late touchdown with 4:13 left. Houston's 2.5 sacks and fourth-quarter interception quickly became the talk of the league, and Wednesday he was named the AFC Defensive Player of the Week.

"It's just inspiring to be in the room with a guy like that," Ravens linebacker Odafe Oweh said of Houston in his postgame press conference. "It's impressive to see."

Since Houston arrived in Baltimore ahead of the 2021 season, the 33-year-old four-time Pro Bowler with 110.5 career sacks has become one of the Ravens' most beloved teammates. He's intentionally sought to be a mentor to many younger players, especially fellow pass rushers like Oweh, and is one of the most respected voices in the locker room.

Yet despite the praise directed to him after the Saints game, Houston made sure to deflect it to his Father in Heaven.

"This is all God. To God be the

glory," Houston said in an on-field interview following the game. "He healed me, restored me, renewed my body ... you gotta give Him all the glory, man. The sky's the limit, and He showed up in a big way for me and this team."

Houston followed that up in his postgame

press conference by crediting God with leading him back to the NFL after contemplating retirement.

"Listen, this is all God, man. This is all God. I think that was my biggest commitment this offseason," Houston said. "I was actually thinking about retiring. My wife and I took a vacation, and I turned my phone off for about three or four days. And I just prayed and I prayed and I prayed, and I heard God."

"I literally heard God say, 'Give Me all of you and I will give you your desires.' And I told my wife, I said, 'Listen, I'm going to be all in this season, and I just want to glorify God in all I do.' The things that are happening on the field I can't even explain. ... I think it's amazing how God's working through me right now. I just pray He's going to continue to work through us."

Houston, a Georgia native and a former Georgia Bulldog, isn't shy to speak about his faith on Instagram either:

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." —Romans 8:28. #GloryBeToGod #FaithBeforeFame

The decision to re-sign Houston during the offseason in the twilight of his career looks better and better for Baltimore's front office. And with key players on the defensive side of the ball, the Ravens are trending in the right direction and looking to push the Bills and Chiefs in the AFC.

—*sportsspectrum.com*

Faith and family keep catcher for Phillies well grounded

Despite achieving fame as an NFL star, baseball player, author, and broadcaster, Tim Tebow has maintained his faith, modesty, and authenticity.

In a recent interview with CBN's Faithwire, Tebow, who just released a new devotional titled "Mission Possible One-Year Devotional: 365 Days of Inspiration for Pursuing Your God-Given Purpose," explained the importance of humbleness and unpretentiousness.

"Understanding the Gospel, I think, really does humble us because we didn't do anything to earn it," he said. "We don't deserve it. I don't deserve it. For by Grace, we have been saved through faith. It is not of our works so that we can't boast."

Tebow said it's not about "how good we are" but that it's "about how perfect Jesus is." Understanding this reality, the athlete said, changes everything.

"It's not about how good we are. It's about how perfect Jesus is," he said. "And



so I think when you understand the gravity and the severity of the Gospel, there's nothing that we get to brag about."

Tebow said the deeper one goes into Scripture, the more he or she realizes Jesus' profound love for humanity. It's a love with the power to humble those who fully comprehend it — especially when contemplating what Christ willingly sacrificed for humanity.

"God loved us enough to send his son on a rescue mission for us and has offered

us this free gift by Grace and Grace alone," he said. "And that is humbling, and when we think that we did something for it, we just missed the mark."

Tebow also said he wants to be the kind of person who points others toward Christ rather than seeking fame for himself.

"If they look at me, I promise I'll let them down, but if they look at Jesus, He'll never let them down, period," he said.

Tebow said he's hoping his new devotional "Mission Possible" has the same impact — pointing people toward Jesus. In addition to encouraging Christians in their faith, he hopes to attract new followers to the reality of the Lord's love.

"I want the impact to be that, if they don't know Jesus, that they know how much Jesus loves them and that one day maybe they say 'yes' to believing that Jesus loves them enough to go to the cross for them," he said. "And they believe what he did on the cross ... counted for them."

One of the NFL's Best Shows He's Just as Good Off the Field

By virtually any metric, be it statistically, the eye test, or the fact that his team won the Super Bowl, Los Angeles Rams standout Cooper Kupp was the best receiver in football last year.

This year, between injuries and general Rams struggles, Kupp's star hasn't shone quite as brightly as it did on the gridiron last year.

But off the field? Kupp's as much of a superstar as he's ever been this year, and a recent tweet proves that.

First, here's the tweet that Kupp dropped on Saturday evening:

"To try to be a voice for our children, who rely on the protection of the men and women that were entrusted the responsibility of nurturing them and raising them up: Please make yourself aware of the attack against our young ones by @balenciaga, and ensure that they are held responsible for it!" Kupp posted to Twitter.

Kupp was referring to a series of truly disturbing ad imagery that fashion company Balenciaga came under fire for in recent weeks.

You can see some of that imagery below, which includes a court ruling that actually upheld "virtual" child pornography as protected speech, and "bondage" teddy bears:

In what many feel is an attempt to save face, Balenciaga pulled the advertisement and filed a lawsuit against the production company that created the ad, North Six Inc. and set designer Nicholas Des, while disavowing that they approved any of the more salacious elements of this advertis-



ing campaign.

"As a result of defendants' misconduct, members of the public, including the news media, have falsely and horrifically associated Balenciaga with the repulsive and deeply disturbing subject of the court decision," the lawsuit states, according to The New York Post. "Defendants are liable to Balenciaga for all harm resulting from this false association."

The lawsuit is ongoing, so it's hard to say where this will end up.

What's not hard to surmise, however, is that Kupp exhibited some genuine bravery by even daring to speak out against the fashion titan. Balenciaga is very much in bed with the establishment media.

Notable celebrities like Kim Kardashian, singer Dua Lipa, and even the artist formerly known as Kanye West have all worked closely with Balenciaga. Of note, West has also condemned Balenciaga for this particular ad campaign, though it came after his association with them had been terminated. Balenciaga has also worked with the world's most ubiquitous video game, Fortnite, and

"The Simpsons." They are a big deal among the Hollywood elites.

"For those of us in positions to create change in the way that companies manipulate people and advertise evil, please stand up!" Kupp wrote on Twitter. That seemed to be a direct call to action for some of his fellow celebrities.

Kupp's courage to go against the grain and stand up for what's right, especially when it comes to children, hearkens back to another NFL player of yore: Tim Tebow.

While Kupp has been a significantly better NFL player than Tebow ever was, the two both share their proud faith and have no problem expressing it in the NFL.

Tebow, whether he was kneeling in prayer during an NFL game or hosting a wonderful prom event for special needs children, has always put his charitable work ahead of his athletic career.

Kupp, meanwhile, still has much to offer on a football field. Again, at worst, he's a top-5 wide receiver in football. He can use his influential platform to effect real change when it comes to these disgusting attacks targeting the minds of children.

One last interesting note: Balenciaga has completely scrubbed its Instagram profile (there are no posts in it at all) and appear to have just deleted its Twitter account altogether.

Perhaps all the extra attention a famous athlete like Kupp brought to the table may have been too much for the beleaguered fashion company.

—*westernjournal.com*



MINISTRY NEEDS GUIDE



Each year Metro Voice provides a listing of organizations that serve the most vulnerable in our communities. Whether it is the single mom and her children, our elderly, orphans, the sick, the homeless or incarcerated, our readers respond with prayers, time, items and finances to keep these ministries going throughout the year. "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" 1 John 3:17. Let us all work together to show the love of Christ this Christmas and the coming year. Together, we can make a difference.

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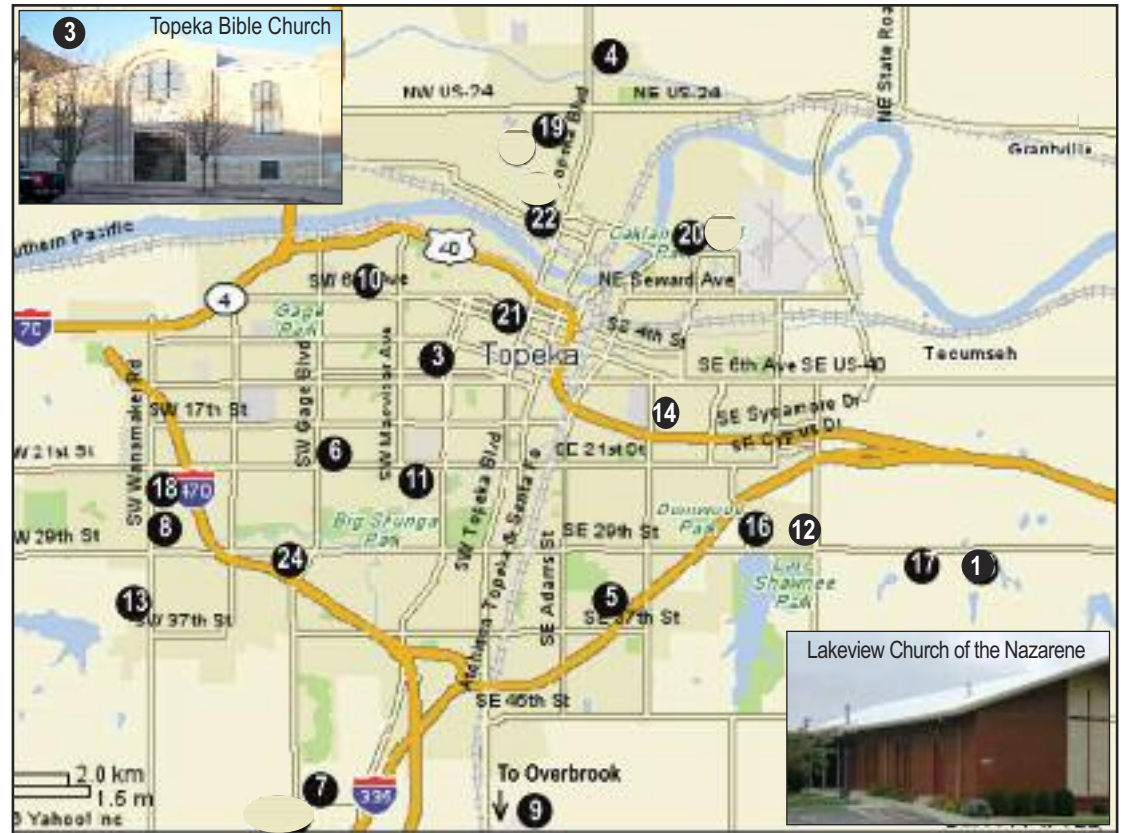
- 13. WANAMAKER WOODS NAZARENE**
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www.wwnaz.org
Sun. Worship: 9am (Hymns) & 11 am
Children's Worship 9 & 11 am
Sunday School 10 am, all ages
Sun. Evening Various Children's Programs
6 pm Life Groups; 6:30 pm Teen Service
Wed. 6:30 pm Adult & Teen Life Groups
Wed. 6:30 pm Kids University
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- 16. HOUSE OF THE LORD CHURCH**
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- 20. HERITAGE BAPTIST CHURCH**
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Topeka, KS 66616 • 785-506-4594
Pastor Dale Stockburger
Sunday Worship: 11 am and 6pm
Sunday School: Sun 10am
Wed. Evening Worship: 7pm

- 21. HARVEST FAMILY FELLOWSHIP**
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785-220-5418
Pastor Rey Rodriguez
Sun. Worship 10:30 am
www.harvestfamilyfellowshiptopeka.org

- 22. FAMILY OF GOD CHURCH**
1231 NW Eugene St.
Topeka, KS 66608
Pastor Roger Randel
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Wednesday Bible Study 7pm
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FOGchurch.com

- 24. TRINITY REFORMED BAPTIST**
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VOLUNTEER WRITERS – Metro Voice needs volunteer writers or interns for church and community news around the area. Call 235-3340 or email voice@cox.net. Some perks. involved.

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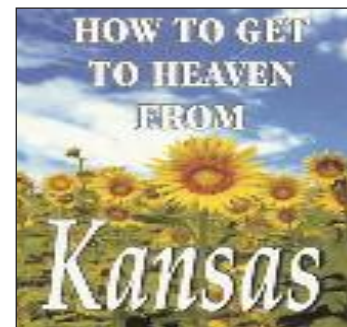
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1. Realize you are a sinner. Everyone starts the same place spiritually. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of god." (Rom. 3:23). Sin's penalty keeps you out of Heaven and condemns you to Hell, separating you from God. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Sin brings both physical & spiritual death. "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." (Rev. 20:14).

2. Realize Jesus paid the penalty. Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection provided a way for you to go to heaven and restore your relationship with God. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8). Since Jesus, God's Son, was the only One who could pay for our sin, He is the only Way to Heaven.

3. Repent of your sin and receive Jesus as your Savior. In order to go to Heaven from KANSAS, or anywhere else, you must accept Christ by calling on Him in prayer. He tells us in Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Use the following prayer, or one similar to it, to receive Him now:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I believe that you died and rose again for me. Please forgive me of my sin, become Lord of my life, and take me to heaven when I die. I am trusting you completely, and in nothing I can do. Thank you Jesus! Amen.

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Finding faith in “The Nutcracker,” a Christmas classic

The popularity of the ballet “The Nutcracker” skyrockets during Advent and the Christmas season because of its pageantry, dancing, and timeless classical music. But have you ever wondered what the story is really all about? If so, you’re not alone.

The story is much clearer, says the Reverend Matt Rawle, the lead pastor at Asbury United Methodist Church in Bossier City, Louisiana, if we use a “lens of faith” to look more closely at the characters and the action.

The story actually resonates with strong parallels to our faith and helps us prepare for Christmas, Rawle writes in his book on the subject.

We can see many parallels to our faith in what happens to the characters. Clara, the main character, is at that “in between” age and always waiting: waiting to grow older, waiting for someone, waiting to understand the world. She is loved dearly by her peculiar godfather who gives her a special gift – the Nutcracker. After the Nutcracker later comes to life, he battles the evil Mouse King, only to die in battle. However, the loving godfather resurrects the Nutcracker, who then takes Clara to his kingdom to the acclaim of many who have awaited his return.

Sound familiar?

“The Gift of the Nutcracker explores (many) Christian themes throughout the four chapters,” writes Rawle, “each focusing on a particular character from the story. In turn, each chapter applies the lessons learned from the story to help us better understand our walk as Christians and relationship with Christ.”

Like Clara, we Christians understand what it’s like to live in an “in between” time of life. We live in this world, raise families, enjoy traditions, and celebrate holidays and holy days. Yet Paul encourages us to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” (Romans 12:2). Like Clara, we find that it is often in these periods of waiting that we see the most growth in our lives.

Or consider Drosselmeir, Clara’s peculiar godfather, who gives her the Nutcracker. He also produces a puppet show that foreshadows future events, though it doesn’t disclose everything that will hap-



pen. If we are watching the play for the first time, we may not know this. But if once we have seen the play in its entirety, we know what events lie ahead.

Similarly, the Scripture passages during Advent foretell the coming of the Messiah, God’s gift of his only begotten son. We know now that Jesus is the King of Kings, but people in the first century did not know the full story. “Scripture doesn’t tell us everything we want to

but what about us? Do we truly feel peace and the hope for a new life by realizing that God will never abandon us?

The final section of the book deals with the Nutcracker, whom Rawle calls “the greatest gift.” When Clara receives the Nutcracker at the Christmas party, she doesn’t know what to think about the gift. It wasn’t something that she wanted, but she found out later that it was a gift that she needed.

know,” writes Rawle, “but it does reveal everything that we need.”

The third section of the book looks at the Mouse King, the villain of the story. We’re not quite sure who he is or why he wants to battle the Nutcracker, but Clara fears him from the start.

Are there times when fear and suspicion are the dominant feelings in our day? Are we constantly fighting battles, both real and perceived ones, throughout the day? Clara finds comfort when the Nutcracker is by her side,

In one sense, Jesus is the gift we wanted, but we are surprised to find that he is also the gift we need. Jesus calls us all to turn the other cheek, welcome our neighbor, feed and clothe the poor, even carry his cross. If we are to welcome the Christ child into our lives at Christmas, we must also embody his teachings and act more like Jesus during the rest of the year.

Rawle summarizes the connections between the story and our faith journey in this way: “Much like our journey as Christians, Clara’s story is one that begins with uncertainty, fear, and struggle, yet ends with comfort, hope, and joy. Both The Nutcracker and the Advent story unfold just as we know they will, but not without the hope and anticipation that always accompany both the dance and the season.”

So the next time you attend a live performance of The Nutcracker, or watch it on TV, be sure to use a “lens of faith” and walk with Christ alongside Clara and the Nutcracker.

—Christopher Fenoglio is the managing editor of UMC.org and writes regularly about books, films, and popular culture. Contact him by email or at 615-312-3734.

46 Years of The Nutcracker: Ballet Midwest’s Annual Production

Symbolizing good luck and their ability to frighten away malevolent spirits, nutcrackers have long symbolized another thing for many people... the Christmas season. Based loosely on E.T.A. Hoffman’s fantasy story “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” the plot of the annual holiday ballet program depicts a girl whose new beloved Christmas gift of a wooden nutcracker that comes to life on Christmas Eve to battle against the evil Mouse King.

Make the Nutcracker ballet a part of your holiday must-dos and watch this unique story transform on the stage during the 46th annual Ballet Midwest Nutcracker, December 9-11, 2022 at the Topeka Performing Arts Center.

At the start of the show, the stage is set as a Victorian Christmas party with boys and girls running around with holiday glee. The merry crew are led into mischief by Fritz, who makes it his mission to torture his older sister, Clara, and the special gift from her mysterious godfather: a Nutcracker.

Falling asleep that very evening, Clara dreams of her darling Nutcracker, her very own night, battling evil against the



Wichers Photography

wicked Mouse King. Victorious, Clara and her Nutcracker (now a handsome prince) travel through snow-covered fields, to cascades of flowers and through the sugar plum-filled Kingdom of Sweets, where dancers take to the stage representing different countries (and their corresponding treats!) throughout the second part of the show.

Ballet Midwest Company and Junior Company dancers are primary players

on stage, but the cast includes both adults and children from the local community. Ages 3 to ageless make up the full cast of almost 200 dancers.

Ballet Midwest’s Nutcracker Ballet is a holiday staple and will be performed live at TPAC, Friday, December 9th at 7:30 pm, Saturday, December 10th at 1:30 pm and 7:30 pm and Sunday, December 11th at 1:30 pm.

Ticket prices are \$22 for adults, \$20

for seniors 55 and older, and \$14 for students 18 and younger. A family pack of two adult and two student tickets is \$60. Tickets can be purchased in person at the TPAC box office, from cast members, and at Barbara’s Conservatory of Dance.

For more information visit www.balletmidwest.net.

Fun Facts:

• All local talent! All the dancers involved are trained right here in North-

east Kansas. Many grow up performing in the Nutcracker every year with dreams of the day they perform the lead roles in the production.

• It’s the longest running Nutcracker in Northeast Kansas.

• Terrific lighting and theatrical effects to behold – smoking cannons, lighting flashes, growing sets, falling snow and more.

• Costumes are stunning! The level of detail with Victorian lace and sequins makes the dancers shine on stage.

• Christmas tree grows over 20 feet in front of your eyes.

• Acting plays a major role in the production – Shannon Reilly (Topeka Civic Theatre’s Artistic Director) consistently creates magic on stage as Clara’s godfather. Each cast member similarly strives to bring out the best in their role, whether scary or stunning, magical or mysterious.

• Incredible pas de deux (dance of two) to view: enjoy watching strong men lift ladies overhead, allowing them to gracefully hover in the air, spin with precision and glide through space.