Holiday Happiness… or Holiday Help

Written by Chaplain Gene Whitmore

The holiday season represents a spectrum of ideas and attitudes. For many, the opportunity to spend time with our favorite people is something eagerly awaited with any holiday period throughout the year.

Among our many fellow service members, these events (and more not listed) are celebrated: Hanukkah, an eight-day winter festival of lights; Christmas, a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth; Yule, a pagan holiday celebrating the winter solstice; Kwanzaa, a secular celebration of life, community, and culture; Rohatsu, a celebration of the enlightenment of the Buddha; and Zarathosht Diso, the Zoroastrian anniversary of the death of the Prophet Zarathustra.

It will not surprise anyone to read that this time of year is one of the most expensive periods of the entire year. Gift-giving in celebration of Christmas is a tradition, whether for sacred or commercial purposes.

An unfortunate reality in America is that many spend money they do not have for items they do not need. Some seem to feel obligated to satisfy high expectations of gift-giving. Perhaps you can celebrate in a way that does not put you in a financial hole for months to come.

For those who love this season and celebrate in a variety of ways, perhaps this suggestion will help you to avoid possible regret in several weeks when the credit card statement arrives: Make a deliberate decision to focus on the thing that matters most to you and your family. Are expensive gifts the only way to celebrate the season? Or is time together what makes this time of year most pleasing to you and those you love?

Some readers may be wondering if Chaplain Scrooge would have you eliminate any spending entirely. That is not the goal. Rather, the goal is to find a way to savor the season without financial regret in February. Financial pressures account for more than half the conflict in relationships. Everything else is the other half. Financial strains can stain a season, and preventing conflict is a great practice in any relationship. The Utah National Guard has a Personal Financial Counselor (pfc.ut.ng@zeiders.com) available to troops and their families at no cost.

It may surprise you to learn that in many staff discussions, senior leaders recognize that not everyone in our formations has the expectation of a wonderful holiday season. It is impressive to hear these leaders sincerely urge others to remember to watch out for each other, be aware of the range of resources available to troops who may struggle for any reason, and keep an eye out for anyone who might benefit from resources that can be utilized this season or during any part of the year.

It can truly help to consult with someone trained to brainstorm ways to cope with emotional distress if this season – or any part of the year – is not the happy period you hope it can be. Contact Ken Francis or Caroline Searcy (kenton.l.francis.civ@army.mil caroline.a.searcy.civ@army.mil).

No matter your reason for celebrating this season, the Chaplain Corps extends our best wishes for joy and safety.