When songwriter Joni Mitchell wrote “It’s coming on Christmas, They’re cutting down trees, They’re putting up reindeer, and singing songs of joy and peace, Oh I wish I had a river, I could skate away on...” she most likely was in a cold enough part of the country where they actually skated on ice. But the point remains even in this mild-climate region; holidays can be rough, especially when you are grieving.

All around you there is a rush to create an upbeat atmosphere with decorations and a continuous stream of holiday music, as if, on cue, you will make merry with lots of smiles and laughter. Thoughtful friends send holiday cards and invitations to join them in celebrating the season. TV and radio commercials, mailers, catalogs and the Internet beckons you to buy and give to family, friends, pets, for yourself or for your home, and the lists goes on. The message comes through everywhere you turn; “It’s the most wonderful time of the year; with the kids jingle-belling and everyone telling you, be of good cheer!”

That may feel like a tall order if you are facing your first holiday without your loved one because you are already picturing a scene of the family gathering together this season with an empty place at the table.

That is a powerful image and one that may tempt you to “skate away” to avoid the holidays entirely. Acknowledging that the holidays will be different is perhaps a good place to begin helping manage the upcoming months. The term different can include a number of meanings, some of which include: out of the ordinary, unique, uncommon, or altered. The words we choose to describe our experience can exert quite an influence on our mindset. Therefore, what if you were to communicate to family and friends that this year you are choosing to alter some of the traditional ways you have previously handled the holidays?

For instance, instead of pressuring yourself to find the perfect gift for each person on
**Light Up A Life**

...is our annual interfaith service to honor your loved ones and celebrate special memories. Start a new tradition of remembrance by attending one of our services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>City, State, ZIP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Presbyterian Church-Indian Trail</td>
<td>Saturday, December 1</td>
<td>2 pm</td>
<td>200 Indian Trail Road, S., Indian Trail, NC</td>
<td>28079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Baptist Church-West</td>
<td>Saturday, December 1</td>
<td>5 pm</td>
<td>1801 Oaklawn Avenue, Charlotte, NC</td>
<td>28216</td>
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<tr>
<td>Levine &amp; Dickson Hospice House</td>
<td>Sunday, December 2</td>
<td>3:30 pm</td>
<td>11900 Vanstory Drive, Huntersville, NC</td>
<td>28078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Beth – El</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 4</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
<td>5101 Providence Road, Charlotte, NC</td>
<td>28226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Comforter Lutheran Church</td>
<td>Thursday, December 6</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
<td>216 N. Main Street, Belmont, NC</td>
<td>28012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospice &amp; Palliative Care Charlotte Region – Main</td>
<td>Saturday, December 8</td>
<td>5 pm</td>
<td>St. Martin Episcopal Church</td>
<td>28204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospice &amp; Palliative Care Lincoln County</td>
<td>Sunday, December 9</td>
<td>3:30 pm</td>
<td>Emanuel Reformed Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospice &amp; Palliative Care Lake Norman</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 11</td>
<td>6:30 pm</td>
<td>Mt. Zion United Methodist Church</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospice &amp; Palliative Care Lincoln County</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 11</td>
<td>3:30 pm</td>
<td>Mt. Zion United Methodist Church</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...to complete and return the Family Evaluation of Bereavement Services Survey
Oh Those Holidays (continued from page 1)

your list, what if this year you gave everyone a copy of an inspirational book you enjoyed or perhaps a gift certificate to make their own selection? Likewise, if even the thought of gift giving makes your head pound, what if this year you skipped shopping entirely? Remember, you can always return to the tradition next year.

Another aspect of the holiday season you may need to balance is time with yourself versus time with others. Social engagements seem to require extra energy when you are grieving. Therefore, try creating a space in your day to sit quietly with a cup of tea or go for a relaxing walk to provide you with a moment of “peace in the midst”.

Finally, consider how you wish to remember your loved one during this holiday season. You may intentionally light a memorial candle on your mantle with a favorite photo nearby to signify his or her enduring presence. Perhaps friends and family can be invited to take turns sharing favorite stories about your loved one or preparing a favorite recipe that your loved one used to enjoy making. Attending one of our Light up a Life memorial services (listed on page 2) may help ease the heartache you have been carrying. However you choose to handle the holidays, try to remain open to experiencing moments of joy. One of those moments may be the best gift you receive this season.

Did you know….

The length of time spent grieving is different for each person. There are many reasons for the differences, including personality, health, coping style, culture, family background, and life experiences. The time spent grieving also depends on your relationship with the person lost and how prepared you were for the loss.

US Department of Health and Human Services
SAMHSA
Grief takes no holiday and is unique for each person. This workshop will discuss ideas for planning for the holiday season and offer a creative activity. To RSVP please email cummingsg@hpccr.org or call 704.335.4334. For Lincoln County, RSVP douglask@hpccr.org or call 704.887.6437.

Group and individual grief counseling sessions are available upon request at all offices. For more information, please call 704.335.4334 or you may call 704.887.6437 in Lincoln County.