

Countering holiday suffering with truth

By JUDITH LINSKOTT

The holidays are not all about bright lights and good cheer. They are also about fatigue, stress, sadness and loneliness — the counterpoint to all the high spirits and goodwill that are the expectations of the season.

Recognizing this, the Litchfield-based Friends of Hospice is offering three support groups for anyone who wants some help in making it through the holidays. Participants are welcome to attend any number of the groups, which will meet on Fridays, from 9:30 to 11 a.m., on Nov. 30, Dec. 7 and Dec. 14. They will all take place at the Litchfield Community Center and are free.

Eileen Epperson of Salisbury, a Presbyterian minister and a specialist in spiritual coaching and reiki energy healing, will facilitate the sessions. Epperson, who is a hospital and hospice chaplain, is familiar with the pain that often accompanies the sometimes forced jolliness of the holidays. In her spiritual coaching, and the related forgiveness workshops, Epperson helps clients sort out their spiritual and moral values and how to live them.

Epperson thinks part of the “difficulty” of the holidays is our hyped-up world, where everything is moving faster and is instantly available. The stress that we live with all year is the “elephant in the living room” that helps make the holidays tricky.

“It’s as if we’re laying frosting on top of manure,” says Epperson. “We’re pretending, and that offends people’s natural integrity.”

The process of forgiving — which has nothing to do with the “other guy” — is one of letting go of resentments and regrets, says Epperson, which are often the anchors for our anger or depression.

“It’s redefining forgiveness,” she says. “Taking responsibility for how we throw logs on the fire and keep resentments going long after the event itself.”

Working at forgiveness, says Epperson, is often very freeing, allowing us to be more effective and happier than we were when we were going around in circles, blaming ourselves or others for our unhappiness. Too often, says Epperson, we get on automatic pilot and forget that no matter what our circumstances, “we can choose what we focus on.”

But you don’t have to be prepared to go through the forgiveness process to attend a support group. The holiday groups will offer a place where people can go and say, “I have no clue how I’m going to get all this done,” or “Who’s going to make the stuffing?” Sharing — at least constructively — helps lift the burden. Hanging onto and suppressing the pain, anger and stress makes them harder on us, says Epperson. “You can be in pain and not have to suffer,” says Epperson. “You can move through it.”

In sharing and admitting one’s fears and resentments, we begin to lose them. “There’s so much power in telling the truth,” says Epperson. “The truth does set you free. It really does.”

To register for a holiday support group, call the Litchfield Community Center at 860-567-8302. For information on Epperson, visit let-resentments-go.com.