



Hope in the Bleak Midwinter

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I love the end-of-year holiday season. Starting with Thanksgiving and running through Christmas, it's a time of anticipation, family, fun, and food for me. Growing up in central Maine, it was usually snowy and just cold enough to remind you it was Christmastime.

Starting in January, however, my mood shifts. I get tired of being cold all the time and long to see the sun. Living now in Cleveland, Ohio, I'm lucky if we get a truly sunny day once a week. Most of the time it's overcast and gloomy and chilly.

This year I particularly feel the bleakness of winter. Wars, drought, famine, election turmoil, and poverty are all I seem to see in the headlines. When I open my Instagram feed, instead of seeing the holiday family photos, now I'm seeing images of war.

Even some of the language around the new year like, "new year, new you" or "it's a fresh start", feels tone deaf. 2023 was a difficult year and 2024 has not started off any better in terms of what we see happening around the world. It feels hopeless and overwhelming and like nothing I do can make any difference.

When I feel discouraged and hopeless, I turn to our global partners. Even amid war, famine, forced migration, and election turmoil our partners are present serving their communities and those who have been marginalized. And we are accompanying them and witnessing their work in many ways.

In Sierra Leone, the Sierra Leone Council of Churches helped monitor the elections held in early 2023 and are a trusted arbiter of the peace forged in the early 2000s after a civil war.



Despite an attempted coup in November 2023, they still have hope for and are working towards a peaceful future.

In Ukraine, the Hungarian Reformed Church is serving internally displaced Ukrainians in western Ukraine and those who fled to Hungary. In Gaza, the Al-Ahli Hospital has and will continue to do what they can to heal and treat the wounded despite blockade and constant bombardment.

In Haiti, despite having their buildings looted and burned by gangs in August 2023, House of Hope remains committed to their mission, to rebuilding, and to serving their community.

In India, our partners are doing what they can to support the victims of ethnic violence in Manipur, most of whom are Christian, and in other parts of India, where there has been a rise in Hindu nationalism leading to violence against non-Hindu communities.

In the Philippines, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines is speaking out against extrajudicial killings and other state-sanctioned violence. Individual pastors and lay leaders have been red-tagged and become targets for state-sanctioned repression because of this activism. Yet, they still speak out and provide places of refuge and sanctuary for others.

In the bleak midwinter, there is still hope. We only have to look for the helpers, as Mr. Rogers said. Our partners are the helpers and I know you all are helpers and have helpers in your communities.

My New Year's resolution is to stop obsessing over and reading every depressing headline and to focus on the stories and news we get from our global partners. You can join me in that resolution by going to www.globalministries.org and signing up to receive our monthly updates and weekly prayers and reading about the hopeful work being done amid difficult situations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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