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“Don’t be afraid!” [the angel] said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.” (Luke 2:10, NLT)

The word “joy” is *everywhere* this month. It will show up in carols, on cards, and even on dishtowels. There’s a good chance a main character in this year’s Hallmark hit will also be named “Joy,” just in case the snow, lights, and mistletoe don’t prove it’s a holiday movie!

Joy is also a theme of the Christian season of Advent, which begins four Sundays before Christmas day and leads up to it. Karis Disability Services is rooted in the Christian faith, and joy is something we can get excited about!

Christmas isn’t a happy time for everyone, though. Costs of living are getting higher and it’s harder to buy presents for loved ones this year. Many people re-live the grief of loved ones lost more deeply at this time. For those who don’t celebrate Christmas (December 25th) or Hanukkah (December 7-15th), the holidays can be a lonely time – reminding people of their differences and sometimes even experiences of exclusion.



To better understand what joy means, we met with Steven in Ottawa. Steven radiates joy. This doesn’t mean his life is perfect. He has had difficult times. Recently he had some health challenges that included pain and discomfort. It was scary, and Steven was honest about how hard it was. Even during these challenges, Steven kept his sense of hope. Most of the time, Steven has a smile on his face and expresses a kind of happiness that makes it hard *not* to be happy to be around him!

Steven loves Christmas. He is a part of Parkway Church South of Ottawa, where he is looking forward to singing Christmas carols and hearing about Jesus’ birth “He was born in the manger,” Steven says. When we asked what Steven likes about the holiday, we found out that he is excited about the gifts. “I like presents,” he says, laughing. Steven is an excellent baker. What does he plan to make for friends and family this year? “Cookies,” he says – though he hasn’t decided what kind. Steven’s smile gets even bigger when we ask him about Santa Claus. He is looking forward to getting together with friends at the Ottawa Christmas celebration. He is excited to see Santa and Mrs. Claus. “I’ve been good,” Steven reminds us (and Santa, if he’s listening!)



Steven's faith community is important to him, and he enjoys singing with his church. "Any song," he says. We spoke with him about "joy" being one of the themes of Advent. He understands Christmas but doesn't know about Advent. "What does that mean?" he asks. We want to find out how Steven shares so much joy with his community and everyone he knows. "What does joy mean to you?" we ask. "I don't know," he responds. Steven teaches us that you don't need to know the definition of joy to be able to share it with others!

Steven has lots of gifts, abilities, and talents that he enjoys sharing with his community. He has an amazing memory for people's birthdays and gifts of singing and baking. We don't just want to celebrate people's gifts if they're easy to talk about, though. Steven doesn't know how to describe what joy is, but being with him brings people joy. As we meet with one another these holidays, let's be thankful for any gifts we get. But let's make sure to look beyond the gifts that can be put under a tree, or even the gifts of what other people can do for us. Even in the hustle and the bustle of this time of year, let's pause and pay attention to the gift that people *are* to us.

I'm thankful not only for the practical gifts and talents that Steven brings to his communities, but also the gift of joy that is hard to describe! We pray that everybody connected with Karis Disability Services has moments of joy in the coming months and that we can share this joy with others.

Making the Connection

- How would you describe "joy"? Is it the same as being happy? When have you felt joyful? There are no wrong answers here – it's not easy to describe!
- If you work directly with people who use Karis Disability Services, what is their holiday season like? Do they celebrate specific holidays as part of their faith or cultural traditions this month? How can we help everyone experience joy at this time of year?