

Tennessee Faith and Justice Alliance

TFJA



THE TENNESSEE
FAITH & JUSTICE
ALLIANCE

DECEMBER 2017 NEWSLETTER

“When people say that the holidays are stressful, I want to say, “Define stress.” For me and many others, the fullest meaning of peace and joy is simply this: **not having to worry about how we will provide food, shelter, and heat for our loved ones.**” –Andrea Fuller



Dear Tennessee Faith & Justice Alliance members,

It's December, which means it is the time of year when many across Tennessee wish friends and loved ones joy and happiness at "the holidays."¹ Lights, wreaths, and greenery adorn streets and buildings. Friends, family, and loved ones gather. Often, glittery cards are sent through the mail and gifts exchanged. The holidays mark a season of giving, time of meaningful tradition, and celebration of faith across much of Tennessee. **Indeed, for many, the holidays mark "the most wonderful time of the year."**

However, for many, the holidays are lonely, isolating, stressful, cold, and dangerous. Amid the hustle and bustle of the season, temperatures drop, utility bills rise, kids come home from school, spending pressures rise, drinking increases, traffic increases, and tension runs high. **It is prime time for legal needs to crop up unnoticed.**

But YOU and WE can help.

"The joy of brightening other lives, bearing each others' burdens, easing others' loads and supplanting empty hearts and lives with generous gifts becomes for us the **magic of the holidays.**" –W.C. Jones

¹ We recognize that using the term "the holidays" to recognize festivity and tradition in December is imprecise and may not encompass all of our faith partners. As used here, "the holidays" describes the meaningful series of celebrations which take place during this seasonal timeframe. We thank you for your grace in forgiving the technical limitations of the term "the holidays" so that we may focus on the practical realities of many in need during this season and ways attorneys and faith leaders can help.

Attorneys and faith leaders are especially suited to give of their time and talents during the holiday season. Just a few hours with a person could mean turning the heat back on in the home, easing tension in a divorce proceeding or resolving a parenting plan dispute, reinstating a drivers' license, or giving peace of mind.

For attorneys, the holidays are the perfect time for pro bono: trial calendars slow, bar associations gather, and attorneys need just a little more CLE credit. For faith leaders, the holidays are a perfect time to open doors for a free legal clinic: it is easy to recruit willing volunteers, people stay in town and want to be inside, and there is free food everywhere. **Instead of spending another evening or Saturday morning fighting holiday rush-hour traffic, try donating time at a legal clinic near you or hosting a special holiday legal clinic!** It will warm your heart, which (we've heard) may even grow three sizes that day!

The majority of legal clinics across the state **are general civil legal advice clinics**, where individuals come with a variety of legal issues and receive counsel and advice from an attorney on site. If you have not attended a general civil legal advice clinic, **we challenge you** to *find one on our monthly clinic list and go volunteer this December.* If you have attended a general civil legal advice clinic in the past and have been thinking about hosting one at your house of worship, **we challenge you** to do it. We're here to help!! *All the resources you need and instructions are here:* <http://justiceforalltn.com/i-can-help/faith-based-initiative>.

Finally, if you have developed general civil legal clinic resources in your community and are looking to expand your good work this holiday season, **we challenge you** to *read on and think about issue-specific clinic development.*

"We generally think of the holidays as a time for giving and make our donations out of empathy. For many working families in poverty, the feeling of not being able to adequately provide for their children is year-long. **If we can take the focus off of expensive gifts at this time of year and reflect year-round about the circumstances that create and sustain poverty, we'll be able to help many people in a meaningful way.**" –Michael Spencer

"As we give presents at the holidays, **we need to recognize that sharing our time and ourselves is such an important part of giving.**" –Gordon B. Hinckley

Money management, healthcare and benefits, housing issues, and family law are particularly common concerns at this time of year. Across the state, there are issue-specific clinics devoted to these issues that both attorneys and faith-leaders alike should have on their radars.

Common Holiday Concern: Debt Relief & Bankruptcy

Where to go: Knoxville Debt Relief Clinic – Contact: Katherine Ellis, Legal Aid of East Tennessee, 865-637-0484

Legal Aid of East Tennessee in partnership with the Knoxville Bar Association Bankruptcy Section offers a Debt Relief Legal Advice Clinic for pre-screened individuals. The purpose of the clinic is to inform and educate individuals about debt issues, bankruptcy and reasons why someone should or should not file bankruptcy. Those who qualify will receive a bankruptcy packet to be completed before the clinic. Clients will also need to bring their tax returns and pay stubs to the clinic.

Common Holiday Concern: Health & Benefits

Where to go: Estate Planning & Power of Attorney Clinics (Various) – Contact: Kathryn Tucker, West Tennessee Legal Services, ktucker@wtls.org; Paige Evatt, Legal Aid of East Tennessee, pevatt@laet.org

These clinics specifically focus on providing Advance Care Directives and Powers of Attorney for members of a particular community, and tend to rotate to different locations on a regular basis. The hosts provide the forms necessary (they are primarily fill in the blank), and have a notary on site to make sure that everyone in attendance leaves with the appropriate paperwork that day. This model of clinic can be a valuable resource to families at the holidays who have questions about elder care for loved ones. The gift of peace of mind that these clinics provide can be an invaluable service for those in need.

Common Holiday Concern: Housing & Heat

Where to go: HELP (Homeless Experience Legal Protection) Clinics located in Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville – Contact: Lori Hackleman Patterson (Memphis), Baker Donelson, lpatterson@bakerdonelson.com; Chris Douse (Nashville), Baker Donelson, cdouse@bakerdonelson.com; Kelli Thompson (Knoxville), Baker Donelson, 865-549-7205

Baker Donelson offices in Memphis, Nashville, and Knoxville coordinate the HELP program of legal clinics for the homeless. HELP is a nationwide network providing vital assistance with legal obstacles preventing clients from

securing housing, finding a job, or obtaining public benefits. This assistance often takes the form of a single consultation but occasionally extends further, depending on clients' needs. Volunteers meet with their clients at local shelters and other social service organizations that are accessible to the homeless population.

Common Holiday Concern: Divorce & Parenting Plans

Where to go: Pro Se Divorce Clinic – Contact: Tina Perrusquia, Community Legal Center, 901-222-3813

Community Legal Center in Memphis provides clinic-based legal help daily for divorcing parents with children. The services offered include parent education, help developing a permanent parenting plan, assistance completing divorce papers and getting them filed, and screening for domestic violence. The clinic often works with the Shelby County Child Support Enforcement division to try to get assistance for pro se litigants obtaining child support orders. In 2016, the clinic helped 375 low income divorcing parents arrange for visitation and obtained over \$245,000 in child support for 663 children.

Don't forget that there are free legal resources available at www.help4tn.org and available by phone at 1-844-HELP4TN. Attorneys can also volunteer their time from the warmth and comfort of their own home or office at www.tn.freelegalanswers.org. For friends and relatives who live out-of-state, keep in mind that anyone can go to www.freelegalanswers.org and see if their state is listed to receive legal help. Many states participate and this is a good resource for people who may have legal issues that are not based in Tennessee.

If we work together, we can make these last days of 2017 the most wonderful of the whole year for Tennesseans across the state.



"I love everything about the holidays: the decorations, the parties, and spending time with friends and family. **What I love most is that feeling of giving back. Every bit counts.**" –Brad Goreski