

FORUM

I thought I would have the holiday blues



Mica James

Guest Columnist

My maternal grandmother passed away close to Easter and, as death usually does, it created a new normal for me. Much of my life was consumed by her in recent years, and I became extremely anxious about what the holidays would be like with-

out her.

For weeks, I had rehearsed my responses to those who may offer invitations to their homes for dinner. I prepared my son to do something we have never done before ... eat Thanksgiving dinner at K&W [cafeteria]. He was actually excited about it but I am sure it made my grandmother turn in her grave. She was not going to be here to taste my desserts and tell me what she told me every year. "Baby, you did a good job. Don't stop baking."

I was going to be able to dress normal because she was not going to be here to make me turn the heat up. I really just wanted to stay home to assure I had time and space to grieve.

The saying goes, "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans." I ended up at my client's house caring for her while her daughter visited with family. Because those close to me know how important family is, they were shocked to learn I chose to work. I must admit, I was shocked myself, but I kept hearing my grandmother's voice singing, "Only what you do for Christ will last."

As those words resounded, the anxiety dissipated and energy was infused. I became excited about baking items

I only bake twice a year. I even rearranged my schedule to make sure everything was baked ahead of time to deliver to my son's teachers, family and friends.

I ultimately realized my grandmother prepared me for such a time as this. I was raised Seventh-Day Adventist and my family ate together EVERY Saturday after church. Even if I didn't attend church, the expectation was that I went to Momma's house to eat. Hors d'oeuvres, main course, dessert, Russian tea and rolls, ALL HOMEMADE, were on a fully set table every week. Guest pastors, their families and anyone my grandmother decided to bring home were welcomed. In fact, when my grandparents added on to their house, they didn't expand the living quarters but rather the dining area because she loved cooking and entertaining.

I thought I would have the holiday blues, but I am thankful for the traditions my grandmother instilled. While she is sorely missed, a day or two out of the year will not overpower the years of memories I have with her and the rest of the family surrounded by food. The knowledge, love and recipes shared around the table every Saturday have empowered me to begin my own holiday traditions.

As I determine what those traditions are, I am reminded and admonish you to remember: "Only what you do for Christ will last."

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White evangelicals are fading, powerful, baffling



James A. Haught

Guest Columnist

Overwhelmingly, 81 percent of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump – a twice-divorced vulgarian who calls women "pigs" and "slobs," brags about extramarital affairs, and boasts of grabbing females by their private parts. He rarely attends church. Nonetheless, strong evangelical support propelled him to the White House.

Can anyone explain this bizarre contradiction? Does it mean that evangelicals

care little about sexual morality and family values taught by their churches? Are they more devoted to Republican conservatism than to their church maxims? This paradox smacks of cognitive dissonance, the confusion suffered when opposite beliefs clash inside a person.

A few white evangelical Americans renounced Trump, but the vast majority comprised his biggest fan base. I hope that a profound scholar will explain what impelled fundamentalists in the 2016 election.

The outcome showed that white evangelicals still wield enormous political power, even as they dwindle in U.S. society. Many studies have outlined the retreat of religion. Here's a

capsule summary:

Since World War II, churchgoing has declined in America and many faith-based laws have ended. It's no longer a crime for stores to open on the Sabbath. It's no longer illegal to buy a lottery ticket or a cocktail or a magazine showing nudity. Mandatory prayer was removed from public schools. Desperate women and girls were allowed to end unwanted pregnancies. Gays were allowed to elude prison, and finally allowed to marry. Birth control was legalized for all couples. It's no longer a crime for unwed couples to live together. It's no longer a crime for movies and books to present sex. Teaching evolution is

allowed in public school biology classes.

These social transformations rebuked the "religious right" allied with the GOP. White evangelicals feel that the ground is crumbling beneath them. Worse, young people are leaving churches.

A new book, "The End of White Christian America," by Robert Jones, head of the Public Religion Research Institute, says that Americans who say their religion is "none" have become the largest segment in the United States. They now constitute 25 percent of adults, compared to 21 percent who are Catholic and 16 percent who are evangelical. The secular tide is sure to rise,

because 39 percent of adults under 30 have no church affiliation.

In a Washington Post interview a few months ago, Jones said the retreat of faith has been "swift and dramatic" in recent decades, first eroding mainline "tall steeple" Protestants, then Catholics and finally evangelicals. Southern Baptists lost 200,000 members in 2014, then another 200,000 in 2015.

A previous book, "The Great Evangelical Recession," by megachurch pastor John Dickerson, warned that "evangelicalism as we knew it in the 20th century is disintegrating." He said "a majority of young peo-

ple raised as evangelicals are quitting church," and "in coming years, we will see the old evangelicalism whimper and wane."

Well, those forecasts may come true someday – but in 2016, white evangelicals decided the presidency. They still have colossal power.

Strangely, they chose a president who contradicts evangelical morality. Trying to fathom America's religio-political tides is bewildering.

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Holiday meals can be healthy as well as satisfying



Ramon P. Llamas

Guest Columnist

Holiday meals can be healthy as well as satisfying

We all know what November means: the

beginning of the holidays. We had Thanksgiving; Christmas and New Year's are coming.

Quality time with the family, office or school holiday parties and seasonal favorites – who can resist pumpkin pie and eggnog, right? The holiday season brings a wide mix of emotions and stress – both good and bad – and the temptation of nostalgic holiday treats can add yet another concern: holiday weight gain.

While eating and merrymaking is both expected and encouraged during these special moments, excessive indulgence can lead to health issues later.

This time of year doesn't have to be synonymous with weight gain, especially if you approach them with a sound game plan that addresses three important factors to gaining weight: nutrition, fitness and stress management. We've compiled a holiday eating game plan with strategies that can help you from gaining those unwanted pounds.

Before-eating tips

*Don't skip meals – especially breakfast – in anticipation of eating larger holi-

day meals later on. Research shows people who eat a healthy breakfast tend to consume fewer calories during the day.

*Have a pre-meal. Don't go to a holiday gathering on an empty stomach. Snack on fruits or vegetables before heading out the door. This will give you a slight feeling of being full, which will help prevent overeating later.

*Plan ahead. Have a plan for self-control, especially when it comes to your most tempting treats. Think ahead about the sights, sounds, aromas and feelings that trigger your personal patterns of overeating, and then make plans to combat these beforehand so they don't become overwhelming. Practicing awareness and mindful eating helps reduce the potential for excessive indulgence.

*Manage stress. Healthline (<http://www.healthline.com/health/holiday-stress-management-tips#1>) highlights five effective ways to manage stress during the holiday season.

*Go for healthier alternatives.

Once you are in the game

*Stay hydrated. Sipping on a glass of cold water or ice throughout the event helps keep you feeling full and staves off the dehydration that comes from eating too many high-sugar, high-salt goodies. Dehydration can actually mimic hunger; tempting you to eat more when in reality, you're just thirsty.

*Practice portion control. It's nice to dig in to your favorite holiday treats. However, the extra effort required later to



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work off the calories – or worse, the gaining of unwanted body fat from eating too much – should be reminders for portion control. So, eat what you want, just keep your portions reasonable, chew food slowly and keep return trips to a minimum.

*Size matters! The bigger the plate you are eating from, the more food you are likely to eat. Use smaller plates at the buffet line as they can help with portion control.

*Be Mindful. Eat food because you're hungry, not because it's there. Make a deliberate decision to control so-called recreational eating. Eat with your appetite, not with your eyes. Examine what's available, and then decide what you really want.

*Eat slowly. The stomach needs about 20 minutes to tell the brain that it's feeling full. But when food is gulped down, by the time the stomach sends its fullness signal to the brain, you've probably already eaten too much food and too many calories. Fill

up your plate, eat slowly and then put the brakes on for a while so that your stomach can send its fullness signal to your brain.

*Veg out on veggies first. Filling up on healthy, low-calorie, high-fiber vegetables instead of high-fat, high-sugar, high-salt and high-caffeine treats will make you feel full without the drawbacks of dehydration, nervousness, weight gain and overeating.

*Share the holiday spirit – and your food. Save calories by splitting treats with another person.

*Enjoy yourself. They don't call it "the most wonderful time of the year" for nothing! But rather than focusing on food, allow yourself to enjoy the personal relationships, meaning of the season, personal reflections, renewed spiritual dedication, holiday games, fun and memories you're blessed to have.

*Remember that healthy eating is only half the battle. You also need to stay physically active.

Happy holidays!

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