



Christmas 2025

Dear Friend,

*It was just after dark, and I had gathered with our kids, our donors, our staff, and my family at the shelter. We formed a circle to mark the night together in prayer and thanksgiving for one another and the gift of God's love in the world.*

*Two of our Faith Community volunteers were playing guitar and singing "Silent Night" as a prelude to our service . . .*

*. . . when a shadow appeared outside the window and lingered.*

I can't help but be reminded of this story each holiday season. Kevin Ryan, president emeritus, shared it with me, a parting gift that truly illustrates what Covenant House is all about. As I sat down to write this letter, I heard his words, this story of love and hope, and I knew I needed to share it with you again today.

I pray this story, an embodiment of the spirit of what **Covenant House** can do, moves you to be a part of blessing our youth this winter.

*The lighting was poor and it was hard to see who was there. The figure was hooded and hunched over. He stood there, looking in, for more than 10 minutes.*

*I left our circle, walked past the manger and the Christmas tree, and went out the front door to see who was standing there. As I approached, I could tell it was a boy, maybe 16 or 17 years old. He had dark circles under his eyes — he looked exhausted.*

*"Hi there," I said and offered a handshake. "I'm Kevin, what's your name?"*

*"Jeremiah." His smile was forced, but he was trying.*

*"Want to come inside, Jeremiah?" I asked.*

*He hesitated, not making eye contact, just gently shaking his head back and forth. "Nah, I'm alright. I'm fine here," he said tentatively.*

*(over, please)*

*“Well, you don’t look alright. You look tired. Come inside — we have some hot chocolate and Christmas cookies,” I offered. But he didn’t move. In my book, something has to be really wrong to turn down cookies and hot chocolate on Christmas Eve.*

*“Look, they’re right there,” I said, and I pointed inside to the table with Christmas goodies. “Come in from the dark and take a load off.”*

*“How much you charge?” he asked, his face filled with skepticism. “I only have \$26 on me, and I need it. I have to find a place to stay and something to eat, and I need my money.”*

*“We don’t charge anything, Jeremiah. Come inside Covenant House with me, okay?” I turned to walk inside, trusting he’d follow, and he did, but slowly.*

*I held the door for him as we entered, and we could hear the chorus singing the refrain of “Silent Night.” The music stopped Jeremiah in his tracks.*

*“My momma used to sing that song on Christmas.” He appeared lost in the memory.*

*“Where is your mom, Jeremiah?” I asked.*

*And he took out his wallet and unfolded a faded, creased Polaroid of a young woman with two small children and a mall Santa in front of a cardboard chimney.*

*“That’s me,” he said, pointing to the little boy on Santa’s right knee. “That’s my brother, Ty,” he said, pointing to the other toddler. “And that’s Momma.” Perfect smiles, all of them, even the little ones.*

*“She died. She had breast cancer six years ago,” he said matter-of-factly, as if he’d said it 100 times before. But something in the way he squinted his eyes betrayed the pain that his words did not.*

*“How about Ty?” I asked.*

*“We went into foster care and got split up. He lives in a group house somewhere. I haven’t seen him in a while.”*

*“Where have you been staying?” I asked.*

*But he had stopped listening to me. Jeremiah’s gaze was fixed on the circle of kids, donors, and staff singing Christmas hymns. He bowed his head and started to shake a bit. His voice broke.*

*“I got nobody, Mister. It’s Christmas, and I got nobody.” His eyes had filled, and the tears were starting to spill down his cheeks.*

*(next page, please)*

*I asked Jeremiah if he wanted something to eat or whether he needed to rest, but he was intent on the circle and its music.*

*Then, Father Placid, who was our chaplain for more than 20 years, invited us into the circle by saying, "Let's gather together and make room for everyone in our circle."*

*We sang, read prayers, and offered one another a "sign of peace," a handshake to express our commitment to one another. Jeremiah took my hand and for the first time made eye contact. "I have nowhere to be right now," he said. "Nowhere. I don't belong in the world."*

*"Yes, you do, Jeremiah. Right here," I replied. "Peace, son."*

*"Peace," he whispered.*

---

*After the service, we talked and ate cookies and apples and turkey sandwiches (in that order, forgive me!). He started to relax a bit. We watched the kids open presents from our donors. And Jeremiah received some unexpected gifts as well — a backpack, sneakers, and a sweater.*

*We sang carols, slurped hot chocolate, and felt grateful to be sharing this night inside — in the light and out of the dark of winter.*

*As Jeremiah, my son John, and I teased each other about who was going to win the Super Bowl, my cell phone rang. Since it was late and the number was from our shelter in New Jersey, I was worried something was amiss. It was.*

*"Someone stole the kids' Christmas presents," our New Jersey shelter director told me. "They broke in through the back windows and took them all."*

*God forgive me, but my first reaction was rage. Who steals from homeless kids on Christmas Eve? Where could we find new presents for kids after midnight? How much was it going to cost to fix the broken windows?*

---

*It took me a moment to calm down, and Jeremiah noticed how upset I was. I explained the situation to him and made sure he was in the capable care of our shelter team before telling him that I needed to speak with our Covenant House New Jersey team and the police.*

*"Here," Jeremiah said. "Take this."*

*He had opened his wallet and taken out the \$26, handing it to me. "They need it more than I do."*

*My friends sometimes call me Cryin' Ryan for a reason. At that moment, I was undone by the giant generosity of this sweet, broke kid who emptied his pockets to bring*

*(over, please)*

*Christmas to other homeless kids he'd never met.*

In just a few weeks it will be Christmas Eve again here at our shelter. **And there will be more Jeremiahs peering through our window outside ...**

They will come to us on Christmas Eve (just as they come the other 364 nights) from our biggest cities and the smallest towns. They'll be from down your street and halfway across America. Girls, boys, kids ... in all shapes and sizes.

But as different as they all are, these kids will have one thing in common. **They will be standing outside on Christmas Eve because they are alone.** Without a family. Without anyone who cares what happens to them that night, or any night.

Please ... will you help us provide shelter and love to the droves of homeless kids who will come to our Covenant House crisis shelters this Christmas?

Your Christmas gift today — whatever you can afford — will give kids like Jeremiah food, counseling, medicine, and a safe place to sleep away from the dangerous streets. But most of all, you will be giving them the love and dignity every child deserves. **Please help if you can!**

We simply can't care for the thousands of kids who will come to us this Christmas without the help of good people like you. Thank you for reading this letter, and for bringing kids like Jeremiah the miracle of God's love, if you can. **May you and those you love enjoy a most blessed, and safe, Christmas.**

May God be with you,



William "Bill" Bedrossian  
President and CEO

P.S. Tonight, more than 2,400 hungry, scared, and all-alone kids will sleep in our shelters. We are seeing more kids in crisis than ever and could really use your help today. There's no other way to say it — the need is urgent. Please help our kids this Christmas. Your gift will be put to immediate use to provide much-needed safe beds, healthy food, educational assistance, counseling, job training, and more for our kids. Thank you again for doing what you can — and for believing with us that every young person deserves a safe place to sleep, especially at Christmas.

P.P.S. I've enclosed a special thank-you gift from our kids. I hope you enjoy the beautiful name labels and that you use them proudly with the knowledge of our mission and the wonderful difference YOU are making in so many young lives.

*Please also send back the enclosed card so I can share your best wishes and prayers with the kids this Christmas. Your card will mean so much!*