A warm fire burns in the fireplace. Loud singing fills the air. In the corner sits a small, pale child with a brace on his leg. A little wooden crutch leans against the wall beside him. Even though his disabilities put severe limits on his childhood, the loudest singing comes from him and a huge grin splits his face. Although Charles Dickens created many memorable and important characters, it is this child who is the most significant. Tiny Tim Cratchit is the most indispensable minor character because he motivates Scrooge to change, he is joyful despite his poverty, and he inspires kindness and generosity of spirit.

To begin, Tiny Tim forces Scrooge to recognize the depth of his own selfishness and cruelty. When prompted to donate money to the poor at Christmastime Scrooge snapped, “If they would rather die, then they had better do it and decrease the surplus population,” (649). Tiny Tim represents the very “surplus population” that Scrooge referenced as he lives in a cramped four-roomed house, wears threadbare clothing, and suffers without the medical treatment he needs. Moved by the heart and loving spirit of this child, Scrooge questions Present asking, “Spirit, tell me if Tiny Tim will live!” The ghost responds that “If these shadows remain unaltered by the future, the child will die…What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population” (667). This pivotal moment in the story prompts Scrooge to evaluate his own vicious words and sentiments. Knowing who the “surplus population” is and seeing a face that represents it is enough to make Scrooge regret his ruthless, self-serving ways.

To continue, Tiny Tim is joyful despite his crippling poverty and gloomy situation in life. His childhood is literally weighed down by a heavy brace and crutch and his family can scarcely afford the Christmas goose he shares with his siblings. Yet he
wishes to strengthen the faith and joy of others. He does not seek pity or charity for himself, but instead wishes to be an example of hope. Bob Cratchit says of Tim, “He told me coming home that he hoped people saw him in the church because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see,” (667). This quote is an obvious testament to Tim’s good nature as he sees beyond his own struggles and instead wishes to bring glory to Jesus. He is more concerned about others finding comfort and peace in their religious faith on Christmas rather than on what he can have for himself.

Finally Tiny Tim Cratchit inspires kindness and generosity of spirit. Bob Cratchit put it best when he said, “And I know my dears, what when we recollect how patient and mild he was although he was a little, little child, we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves and forget poor Tiny Tim I doing it,” (675). The Ghost of Christmas Future showed Scrooge’s death and it was marked with greed and hatred. On the other hand, Tiny Tim’s death is marked with honor even though he was just a small, sick boy. His spirit continues to live on and inspire his family. They remember his kind, uncomplaining example and it inspires them to treat each other well. This moment deeply affects Scrooge and readers alike because it shows the power of a humble, generous spirit. When tempted to speak or act harshly, the Cratchit family members will remember Tim’s goodness and act in peace instead. A spirit like that has a legacy even death can’t bring to an end.

In conclusion, Tiny Tim has few lines in this classic story, yet he is the character most responsible for Ebenezer Scrooge’s dramatic transformation from a greedy, hard-hearted man to a generous one. Charles Dickens crafted many fine characters, but none
of them had quite the power of Tiny Tim. He is the most indispensable minor character in *A Christmas Carol* because he represented the “surplus population”, he was joyful despite his poverty, and he inspired a spirit of kindness and generosity.