

WHOSE BIRTHDAY IS IT, ANYWAY?

Ideas for a
Christ-Centered Holiday
2006



Simple
Ideas For
Reducing
Christmas
Chaos

Discovering
NO COST
Gifts!



Inspiring Reflections
& Fun Activities

Why a Simple
Christmas?

There's a Camel
in Our Bathroom!


Alternatives
for SIMPLE LIVING

TOP 10 USES of “Whose Birthday?”

For Congregations:

1. Distribute to individuals, families and groups
(Use our free promo kit on paper or on-line.)
2. Bible Study, such as a women's circle or men's breakfast
3. Sunday School and Adult Forum
4. Pulpit Talk or sermons
5. “Simple Christmas” workshop
for your congregation or community
(Use our “Alternative Event Organizers’ Kit.”)

For Individuals and Families:

1. Weekly Family Meeting & Fun Time
2. Personal devotions
3. Mealtime discussion
4. Extended family gatherings
5. Christmas planning time or event
Hold a family meeting between Oct. 1 and Nov. 1 to talk about Christmas expectations. What do each of us really want? Who is going to do what? What is really most meaningful? Are we willing to spend less on ourselves and give more to the needy? Write down and post decisions and changes to consider.

More Exciting, Helpful Ways to Use “Whose Birthday?”

1. Order additional copies of this booklet. Give or mail them to friends in place of Christmas cards. Use a 9x12 recycled envelop. Insert a personal note or your family Christmas letter (on recycled paper).
2. Send photocopied articles to friends, relatives and members of your congregation.
3. Download the text for your church newsletter at SimpleLiving.org » Services » Archives » Whose Birthday? Pay Alternatives a reprint license of only \$25 (up to 500 members) or \$50 (500+ members). Read past editions there too.
4. Read BONUS materials not included in this booklet at simpleliving.org » Services » Archives » Whose Birthday? 2006.

Going Beyond “Whose Birthday?”

1. Check out the 20+ ideas of our Simpler Living Community Network. Visit SimpleLiving.org » Volunteers » Activities to Try, select an activity. Try it!
2. Learn how to influence others toward simpler living. Read “Guidelines for Change.” Visit [Simple Living 101: How to Influence Others](http://SimpleLiving.org).
3. Be a proactive volunteer. Read “Simple Living 101: Toolbook for Activists Shy or Bold.” Listen to “Living Simply and Loving It!” CD.
4. Plan a public event, such as “Unplug the Christmas Machine” workshop. Read “Alternative Event Organizer’s Kit.”

Want more ideas and details? Visit SimpleLiving.org » Volunteers.

We'd love to share your results and ideas with others!

More on Alternative Giving p.16



Organized in 1973 as a protest against the commercialization of Christmas, Alternatives for Simple Living encourages people of faith to examine and challenge our consumer society.

Commercial advertising is full of alluring and seductive yet empty promises. Strong cultural pressures at Christmas and throughout the year lead many to live and celebrate in ways that are neither fulfilling nor joyful.

Alternatives is a non-profit organization that works with Protestant and Catholic churches to provide materials on responsible living, social justice and peace.

We proclaim that celebrations and living can indeed be what we hope for. Joy to the World need not be an empty promise.

We welcome people to join us in our efforts by becoming members and volunteers. Contact us for our free catalog, about membership and our nationwide speakers' network. Visit our extensive web site -- SimpleLiving.org.

Resources

- Christmas resources for church and home
- Year-round worship materials
- Videos, CDs and DVDs challenging consumerism
- Wedding Alternatives
- Toolbook for activists shy or bold
- Collections of graphics and quotations
- Ideas for celebrations throughout the year
- Resources for individuals, church leaders and groups
- Meeting the needs of young adults



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Alternatives' Honorary Board of Directors

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Convenor, Call to Renewal

Why a Simpler Christmas?

A simpler Christmas leads to freedom. A consumer Christmas leads to stress and debt. Simplicity leads to generosity.

It leaves room for more joy. It is such a joy to get the burden of stuff off our shoulders.

It builds relationships. We are told thousands of times every day by commercial advertising that we will find meaning and happiness through stuff. Voluntary Simplicity says we will find happiness and meaning in life through relationships – within ourselves, with others, with the Earth and with God.

It leads to a whole life of simplicity. Celebrating is one part of a total life of integrity. This booklet is one step on the life-long journey of simple living. Only we can choose to simplify our own lives. This booklet can help.

It promotes justice. By using only our fair share of Earth's resources, we leave some for others around the globe and for future generations. "Live Simply that Others May Simply Live."

It Cares for Creation. A simple life is an Earth-friendly life.

Let's have a simpler Christmas this year! – Editor

What Has Happened to Christmas?

Too much time spent on parties and not enough on the people important to us? Too much money spent on things, but not enough care given to our loved ones? Too much rush and chaos and crush to fit everything in? Why is Christmas so important to us, and why do we so often feel like we've missed it?

"Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?" is an alternative to the negative pressures on Christmas. We have asked the same questions and felt the same disconnection between the season and our celebrations.

This magazine has practical ideas to help re-think the ways to celebrate Christmas. Everyone deserves a Christmas that has meaning, value and peace. Slow down, take a breath, and read these suggestions that let the real Spirit of Christ come home this Christmas. – Doyle Burbank-Williams, Chair Alternatives Board of Directors

**GIFT
IDEA**

We maintain houses full of objects. Some of those objects may make perfect gifts for others, especially when passing on family treasures. Then do not replace them!

**GIFT
IDEA**

Weekly Family Time: How to Use These Reflections & Activities

The resources provided here offer individuals, families and other small groups a way to remember the reason we celebrate this holy season. The reflections are intended be used from the first week of Advent and follow through to the Feast of Epiphany.

Before Advent begins, make an ADVENT WREATH. Find a book with instructions or follow these simple directions. Take a large, flat, shallow bowl (at least 9 inches in diameter) and fill it with sand or coarse salt. Place four purple candles securely around the edge of the bowl. Place a large white

candle in the center. Make a circle of evergreens and place them around the bowl.

You will also need a manger scene, a Bible and matches. Light one purple candle the week of Advent I; two the week of Advent II, etc. Light all five beginning on Christmas Eve.

Set aside time each week to worship, perhaps after a meal on Sundays. Invite those who may be alone to join in.

Depending on the ages of those in your group, adults may want to read the reflections beforehand. Incorporate

the short Advent-Christmas ideas throughout the booklet into worship time, especially as a discussion starter.

Read and discuss one reflection at each meeting. Sing along with the well known tunes of the "Carols with Justice" CD or from SimpleLiving.org » Services » Archives, scroll down to Carols.

Gather around the Advent wreath. Take turns reading, lighting the candles, praying, singing and sharing feelings and ideas.

“Celebrate this season with every one of your senses, and as many of the people you love as possible. Send the light within you out into the world, with your particular blessings.”

Meg Cox

Let Us Have a Truly Christ-like Christmas

by Linda Drey-Nightingale

I have always found it odd that Christmas involves consumerism. Christ was not in the habit of giving physical gifts, but spiritual gifts. We can still enjoy the spirit of giving without “buying” into consumerism.

Throughout this booklet are some ideas to enrich your Christmas and not necessarily enrich the pocketbooks of businesses and deplete the environment. Watch for “GIFT IDEA.”

The possibilities are endless. Just let your mind be creative. While you are out during this holiday season, remember to combine trips, take along a bag for purchases or do not accept a bag for anything you can carry, rent or borrow rather than buy supplies for parties, and enjoy moments with family and friends.

(from Ladera Community Church newsletter, Portola Valley, CA, about their Alternative Giving Fair)

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

Affluenza book and DVDs

Living Simply

Living More with Less - book, study guide, poster, post card, book mark

Whether this is your first or your 20th year reading “Whose Birthday?” WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK on the new format and design, as well as the content. Email Alternatives@SimpleLiving.org, write or call. Thanks.

The Spirit of St. Nicholas

by David Holden

December 6 is the feast day for St. Nicholas. St. Nicholas was bishop in the city of Myra in the country we now call Turkey in the Fourth Century. That is about all we know for sure about him. Most of the stories about him are clearly products of the pious imagination. But common themes run through those stories: St. Nicholas fiercely defended the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He protected children and women from abuse and exploitation. He advocated with kings for prisoners. Not surprisingly, he became one of the most beloved saints of the Orthodox Church, in which I have found my spiritual home.

I learned about the spirit of St. Nicholas, however, long before I became Orthodox. I was reared in a small Methodist church in North Carolina. We thought we had a big crowd when forty people came to church. We had about a dozen youngsters in the church and the adults always made us present some kind of Christmas pageant—the old and very simple kind with only readings and carols.

The thing that I most vividly and fondly remember about those childhood pageants was the gift bags. They

were little brown paper bags, and in them were an apple and an orange, a peppermint candy stick, and a couple of walnuts. They were about as simple a Christmas gift as anybody could have, and they were certainly all that a small church of lower-class working people could afford at that time. But they were wonderful gifts, because everybody got one. All of us in the pageant and all the regular churchgoers got one. And everybody else who came to the pageant got one. It did not matter if they were church members who only showed up once a year. It did not matter if they were members of other churches in our community. It did not matter if they belonged to no church at all. Everybody got one of those bags. Bishop Nicholas would have loved them.

“They were wonderful gifts because everyone got one.”

On December 6, we ask St. Nicholas to pray for us. We say to him, “Who could hear of thine unlimited condescension and wonder not at thy patience and cheerfulness toward the poor, thy compassion over the sorrowful? For thou didst teach all concerning God.” We ask St. Nicholas to ask the Lord for the grace to share His love with everyone we meet.



David Holden serves as a therapist in Boone, NC.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

- Worship Alternatives
- Money Wise Meditations

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you suppose American culture focuses on Santa Claus instead of St. Nicholas?
2. Do you have a new idea of a way to include St. Nicholas into your family's or congregation's celebration?
3. St. Nicholas reached out to the poor. How are you in community with the poor?
4. What can we learn from poor people at home and around the world?

My Hand-Made Advent Wreath

by Amy Frykholm

One late November several years ago, my sister-in-law and I hunted in the woods near my house for the makings of an Advent wreath. We came home with an abundance that surprised me: three kinds of evergreen, the tiny red berries and sturdy leaves of kinnikinnick, the faded color of rose hips, the delicate heads of cinquefoil blossoms, the graceful arch of juniper and berry. I had no idea that our backyard could yield such winter variety.

Last year, I returned to the same spot where my sister-in-law and I had made such a fruitful search. The snow was deep, and most of the bounty I had anticipated was buried. Even by digging, I couldn't find the kinnikinnick; the blossoms and rosehips were crushed by the weight of the snow. In a driving wind, I collected reliable evergreens and their cones, but little else.

During the pre-Christmas rush, our culture seems to ask us to feel nostalgia or anticipation. We try to recreate the past or we imagine that a "true Christmas feeling" is just around the corner. In the prophets, we hear a different call. Though they pointed people to the future, they first called them to honesty about the present. We carry

“ I meditated on how even this simple act was teaching me both acceptance and attention. ”

their stark attention during Advent when we try to stay awake in the here and now. The Advent wreath I produced last year was sparser, but as I wove it, I meditated on how even this simple act was teaching me both acceptance and attention. In the present, we can find both unexpected fullness and unwelcome emptiness. Both prepare us for the birth of the holy into our very midst.



Amy Frykholm runs a community center called Bastante – start fresh, find direction, move forward – in Leadville, CO. Contact her at BastanteLeadville@yahoo.com or (719) 486-1935.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

Christmas Angels
Waiting for the Wonder:
Voices of Advent
2007 Simple Living Wall Calendar
Advent/Christmas Guided Journal

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you anticipate the "Christmas spirit" each year? Where do you search for the "Christmas spirit"?
2. Was there ever a time or situation when the spirit never came? What did you do?
3. What natural resources do you have to make your own Advent wreath?
4. Could you develop a family tradition of making, discussing and using the wreath for Advent devotions?

I Am a Recovering Christmas Hater

by Jessica Stevens

It was my final and busiest year of university. Emotionally, I was not ready for Christmas. The coffee shop where I worked had exploded way too early with every kitschy Christmas decoration known to human kind and the most saccharine of holiday carols. It grated on every nerve for two months. Every eggnog latte was prepared with a side of disdain. While others had a sense of joy and expectation I had a sense of impending doom. On the 24th of December I worked a morning shift and was near tears as the time for me to go home approached. I felt like everything but celebrating. On the way out a friend told me I could go to her house if I just couldn't deal. I hoped it wouldn't come to that.

Mom made dinner. We went to a church service and went home. We each opened one present and went to bed. When I woke up on Christmas day, a dog with antlers was in my face. He was happy because he was awake. Oh, how I envied him.

Puffy eyed I shuffled out to the living room where my youngest brother had already raided his stocking and was bouncing off the walls in anticipation of the sweet booty yet to be plundered. I played it cool, but not for long. Two things stand out from that day. Two things that turned me from my Christmas hating ways. One, the present Mom gave me. She framed her very first painting of a human subject

and placed it under the tree for me. I love this painting. From the first day I saw it I knew my mom had done something great. I couldn't believe she wanted me to have it. I would never even dream to ask for it. It cost her little but was priceless. She gave me a part of herself. This bit of grace shown to a dissatisfied punk kid was overwhelming. I've cried on Christmas before but never out of gratitude.

The second thing was something my dad arranged. Our Christmas dinner would not be eaten at home. Dad has a good friend that is also a member of the Lummi Nation (a tribe in Washington state). This friend needed help getting Christmas meals to the elderly and shut-in on the reservation. Dad offered his family. We became solemn as we dumped green beans into large pans, sliced pumpkin pie and stuffed roasted turkeys into insulated bags. I looked around at the residents at the assisted living facility. Some residents had a few family members to eat with but most quietly came down from their rooms. Occasionally some people from the community that had nowhere else to go joined us. Scattered around the room and without much eye contact they ate their holiday meal. I kept walking by the food baskets waiting to go to the people that couldn't make it out of their homes and tried to imagine how they would be received.



That year I found Christ in the grace of my mother's gift. I found the family Christmas I thought was left behind. We finally made our own tradition. Our family was again extended at Christmas and for a little while we became family to others.

(from Mustard Seed Associates, Seattle, WA, November 2005 newsletter)

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

- Because Brian Hugged His Mother
- Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge
- The Christmas Thingamajig
- Christmas Game
- Unplug the Christmas Machine

GIFT IDEA

If you have a talent you enjoy, share it with a gift certificate, e.g., pie baking, babysitting, gardening.

GIFT IDEA

Strangers Invited in for Christmas

by Millard Fuller

"I was a stranger and you invited me in..." Matthew 25

Several years ago at the Christmas season, my dear friend, Jacob Battle called me on the phone. His tone was frantic, "Millard, I was coming back to Americus from Albany and I saw a man and woman and three small children standing on the side of the road. I stopped and talked to them. They said they were homeless and had no place to stay. I took them to a nearby motel and arranged for their lodging but I can't afford to keep them there. What can you do to help?"

The local Habitat for Humanity affiliate had recently acquired an old house. We had started to fix it up, but the work was not complete. Christmas day was only a week away and many people had left for the holidays. All work was at a standstill until after Christmas.

I called a family meeting. Linda and I told our children about the situation and we asked if they would like to work on that old house to make it livable for the homeless family so they would

have a place for Christmas. Everyone enthusiastically agreed.

We went to work. Our two youngest daughters, Faith and Georgia, were especially excited. They scraped off old paint from the walls, went to the store with Linda to get paint and other supplies and worked tirelessly all week long. Some days the work continued well

into the night. Some friends also joined in to help out.

Finally, it was Christmas eve. Rugs were put down. Lamps were bought and put on side tables. Other furniture was purchased and moved in. A Christmas tree was donated by a family friend and set in place in the living room. Lights were strung on the tree and presents for the children bought and lovingly placed under the tree.

The family was brought in. You could see the joy on the little faces of the children. And, mom and dad were so happy, too. Christmas was so meaningful that year, not only for that family but for our family, too.

“To this day, we remember that as one of our best Christmases ever.”



To this day, we remember that as one of our best Christmases ever.

Millard Fuller is the Founder of Habitat for Humanity and the Founder and President of The Fuller Center for Housing. He also serves on Alternatives' Honorary Board of Directors.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

The Shoemaker's Dream
Treasury of Celebrations
Carols with Justice -
booklet and music CD

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What would you have done if you were in Millard's place?
2. Have you ever had unexpected guests at Christmas? How did your family adapt to the situation?
3. Have you ever taken strangers into your home? What positive and negative events happened?
4. What could your children learn from practicing hospitality with people in need or crisis?

A Christmas Cow

by Walter Wink

Christmas Day had always been a problem. We tried taking turns reading Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," but you can guess how that went. We tried singing our way through a Christmas song book, but it had escaped my notice till then how many really bad singers our family had. Then—inspiration! I remembered receiving a catalogue from The Heifer Project that described the various gifts available: so much for a heifer, so much for goats, sheep, chickens, and so forth.

I raced to the art store and purchased a large sheet of poster board (cardboard would have been better, as things turned out). On the poster board I drew a heifer as best I could, freehand, and then proceeded to draw the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle on the poster board. When I had cut the pieces out, I put four or five pieces in plastic lunch bags for each person there.

“With as much Dickensonian aplomb as I could muster, I passed out the bags of jigsaw pieces.”

Everything was now in readiness. On Christmas morning the family joined in a circle, somewhat mystified. With as much Dickensonian aplomb as I could muster, I passed out the bags of jigsaw pieces. With no picture, just a white sheet of poster board, the family started slowly. (To help them a bit, I had used as my bovine model a Holstein.) In time, however, the tempo increased, and the job was finished in a frenzy.

Then we all sat back, and I began to tell them the story of the heifer, and how the one we had purchased was soon to be traveling to a country far away, not to be slaughtered for food, but to give milk, and not just for one family, but to help feed an entire village.

You can contact Heifer Project International at heifer.org for their gift catalogue.



See page 16 for more Alternative Giving ideas.

Walter Wink is a prominent theologian, speaker and author.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

- Faith the Cow
- Beatrice's Goat
- The Goat Lady

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why or why not are you willing to donate to help others through Heifer or your denominational hunger program?
2. Why would it be important to have you and your children donate? What would your children learn from you about the world community?
3. Do you agree with "Give a person a fish and they eat for a day. Teach a person to fish and they eat for a life time"? Why or why not?
4. What does "Live simply that others may simply live" mean to you?

Putting Christ in Christmas

by John Hagberg

A common lament of the season is that Christ has been taken out of Christmas. The commercialization, the overindulgence, the busyness of the world are all refrains in this lament.

For those who wish to sing another song, there is good news in the fact that Christ was never fully in Christmas. Rather than lamenting those who would take Christ out of Christmas, Christians are called to put Christ into this winter holiday.

The fact is that Christmas is a rather late Christian festival. The first celebration of Christmas in Rome was in 353 or 354. The choice of December 25 as the celebration of Christ's birth was an attempt by the Church to use the images of a pagan midwinter festival, the birthday of the

Mithraic Sol Invictus, to celebrate the birth of Christ. As the world began to celebrate the lengthening of the winter days and the return of light in the northern hemisphere, the Christian community celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ as the true Light of the world.

We put Christ in Christmas as we consider the background of Luke's Christmas story. In the context of the oppressive tax policies of the Roman Empire, the Christ child was born, not in the center of empire and privilege, but in the lowly town of Bethlehem, among the least of the world. His life, as was his birth, was among the least and the lowly, empowering and including them in the blessings of life.

We put Christ into Christmas as we work in soup kitchens and bring food

to the hungry, as we give the gift of a warm coat or gloves, as we challenge our law makers to legislate in ways that include all in the blessings of life. With generous hearts that give gifts that cannot be returned, we can decorate our homes, light our streets, gather in joyous celebrations, and sing of the Christ, whose light pushes back the darkness of our world.

John Hagberg serves as pastor of St. Mark Lutheran Church, Sioux City, IA.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

Cloth for the Cradle

Yards of Purple

Tracks in the Straw

Hunger for the Word

Shine On, Star of Bethlehem

10 Ways You Can Help

1. Carol for shut-ins. Sing real Christmas carols, not holiday songs.
2. Serve and be served regularly at a local free restaurant (formerly called "soup kitchen").
3. Donate good used toys. Let the children select the half of their toys that they're ready and willing to share with others.
4. Knit and donate an afghan to a domestic abuse guesthouse (formerly "battered women's" shelter).
5. Donate good usable coats to Salvation Army or Gospel Mission.
6. Prepare soup jars of dried ingredients for busy, single working parents.
7. Distribute coupons for free child care (formerly baby sitting) to busy, single working parents.
8. Help a neighbor by placing real luminaries (candles in milk jugs and sand in bottom) leading to the door on Christmas Eve and sing "Christ is the Light of the world."
9. Learn and share about traditions and foods from the developing world, such as "Las Posadas." (See. p. 13)
10. Learn about groups traveling to a developing country to learn and serve.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What family tradition do you have that puts Christ at the center of Christmas?
2. What new SERVICE tradition would you consider in your celebration?
3. How have you simplified your celebrations? What ideas about simplifying are you willing to share with others, including your extended family?

Christmas Dinner

by Jamie Norwich-McLennan

I look around the dinner table on Christmas Day and think about how surprising life can be. Laughter floats around the room, and our table is filled with good food prepared by many hands. There is an air of excitement and anticipation as we join hands to offer thanks.

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

Winston Churchill

Four years previously, Christmas dinner was far more simple; my husband and I grabbed snacks and relaxed after the chaos of multiple Christmas Eve services the night before. This year things are different; our family has unexpectedly grown, and around our table sits our 20-year old Tajik daughter, our 19-year old Korean daughter, and her not-quite-yet-declared 20-something Korean boyfriend. Five people gather around the table to celebrate this Christmas; four are Christian, and one is Muslim.

The world has come to us, and opened us to unexpected possibilities.

Outside our doors, newspapers and stores proclaim the “Christmas Wars,” calling for all to “put Christ back into the season!” Inside our home, we recognize the increasingly global nature of our world and the

diversity of faith in our own country.

How do we appropriately greet this day in the midst of this complexity? With love. We reach out and practice loving the world one person at a time, a continual challenge of learning to live out God’s love. Those who gather around our table today experience God’s love in different ways—and yet each one of us knows that love to be real. That is the true meaning of Christmas.



Jamie Norwich-McLennan serves as pastor of Trinity Parish United Methodist Church, Rising City, NE.

If you enjoyed this article, you’ll also enjoy these resources:

- Hundred Dollar Holiday Christmas Reader/Sampler/Collection Set
- Home for Christmas
- Watch for the Light

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel uncomfortable with Christians and Muslims celebrating Christmas together? If so, why?
2. Do you agree that our world can work for peace when we work together as diverse cultures and religions?
3. In the wake of 9/11 are you struggling personally how to relate with the complexity and diversity of our culture and beliefs of our Muslim cousins?

“Posada sin Fronteras” (Shelter Without Borders)

by Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell

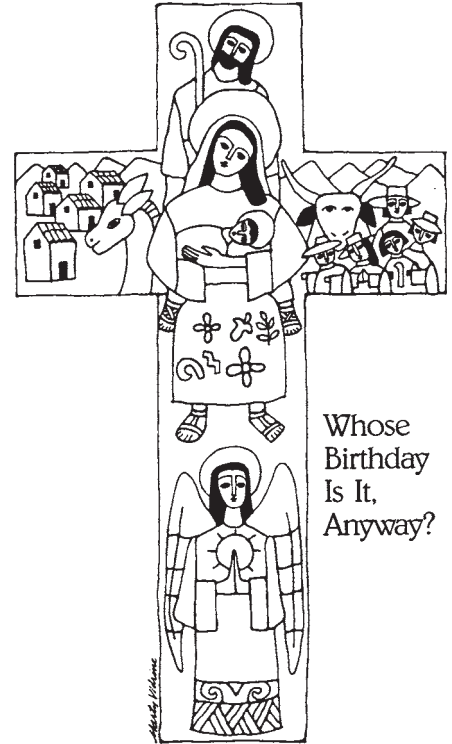
Few would argue that Christmas has become too commercialized, or that it has deteriorated into a festival of manic consumption, mirroring much of what is most problematic about our economic way of life. The biblical Christmas stories, in contrast, reflect poverty and marginalization. The immigrant couple Joseph and Mary are so poor that they are unable to procure desperately needed lodging. Yet it is their courage in hard circumstances, their sensitivity to dreams and visions, and their willingness to respond to God’s call with courageous choices that facilitates the incarnation of God’s good news in the world.

An opportunity to re-enact this biblical story comes each Advent with the Posada festival celebrated by Mexican communities in the U.S. and Mexico. The Posada is a nightly ritual of remembrance in which people accompany the Holy Family from house to house around the neighborhood, reenacting the search for shelter. It comes alive among immigrant communities, for whom this journey is all too real. Visiting a Posada can be a great way to “feel” the biblical drama,

and thus re-orient our perspective from holiday affluenza to God’s solidarity with the poor. In San Diego, CA, local churches sponsor a dramatic “Posada sin Fronteras” (Shelter without Borders) at the U.S.-Mexico border, in which participants from both sides reach out their hands to one another, and remember the plight of immigrants like Joseph and Mary facing poverty, peril, and persecution today.

We have been challenged and transformed by our encounters with contemporary immigrants. We urge readers truly to celebrate Christmas by discovering where and who these too often invisible immigrants are in our own communities, and finding meaningful ways of getting to know them and their stories. Or consider participating in an “exposure” trip to learn more. We recommend the programs run by Borderlinks (www.borderlinks.org) in Tucson, AZ. May the ongoing struggle of the displaced poor for “posada” bring the gospel story alive—and vice versa!

Ched Myers is a prominent theologian, educator, speaker and



Whose
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Anyway?

author. The Rev. Matthew Colwell is a Program Partner of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, Oak View, CA.

For an introduction and a hymn for Las Posadas, visit SimpleLiving.org » Services » Archives » Christmas Packs » 1990 » Las Posadas.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

The Christmas Gift (bilingual)

A Gift for the Christ Child

2007 International Wall Calendar (Peace Corps)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you have an Hispanic community in your town? Would you be willing to have them come to talk about and demonstrate Las Posadas? Are you willing to participate in their celebration?
2. How do you imagine your attitude toward immigrants might change or evolve as you experience Las Posadas?
3. Do you have experience with recent immigrants? Are you a recent immigrant? Share these experiences.

There's a Camel in Our Bathroom!

by Nancy Christenson

Our nativity came alive this Christmas as we tried a little experiment. Our usual tradition is to keep Baby Jesus wrapped as a special gift to be opened first on Christmas morning.

This year our decorations went up later than usual, so the kids' church Christmas program was fresh in our minds, with thoughts of the wise men's long journey following the star particularly clear. Instead of setting all the nativity guests in place in the stable under the tree, just waiting for the star attraction, we added more space.

The kids found "fields" for the shepherds and sheep, and home "lands" for the wise men and their camels. The only figures who moved before Jesus arrived were the sheep and shepherds, looking for fresh pasture to graze in. The anticipation filled the kids with excitement and wonder—WHEN will these journeys begin??

I will admit it was a little startling for a while to meet the wise man in the bathroom and the one in the pantry

between the cereal boxes. But it really brought home the timeline of events of that first Christmas for our whole family.

Baby Jesus arrived on Christmas morning and the shepherds met the assorted heavenly hosts dangling in the hallway before they headed over to the stable. The wise men finally spotted

the biggest and "brightest" wooden star ornament hanging over the stable and took their time journeying across the house so that they arrived

on January 6 (Epiphany). For us, Christmas became more than just one night.

In fact, I hadn't realized how effective this little experiment was until after the wise men's visit, when my son suddenly panicked that all the figures had to go home and Mary, Joseph and Jesus had to get out of there! Alarmed, I questioned what was wrong and he replied, "Nobody STAYED, Mom! Besides, Herod is after Jesus and they have to get to Egypt!!!"



The Holy family made it to "Egypt" safely and the others returned home. God's story of His greatest gift filled us with the passion that only He can stir in our hearts. And I think we began a new family tradition!

May your Christmas be more than just one Holy night!

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

The Nativity

What Kids Really Want That Money Can't Buy

“The anticipation filled the kids with excitement and wonder.”

“Creating rituals for our children is one of the most vital and joyful roles that parents fill. More and more studies show that kids raised with thoughtful, affirming traditions grew into resilient, nurturing adults.” Meg Cox

**GIFT
IDEA**

By buying someone a membership in a nonprofit they get a double benefit. The money went to someplace they believe in, and they are not writing a thank you note for some object that they did not need.

**GIFT
IDEA**

Giving Circles

by Meg Cox

At this time of year, those of us blessed with comfortable lives start thinking about all those others who struggle to eat, sleep, live and learn.

It's great to donate to the needy while full of holiday spirit, but how do we take those philanthropic impulses and weave them into the ritual fabric of our year-round lives?

Here's a giving ritual for groups of grown-ups. Family traditions of giving and community service are important, but it's also imperative that parents strengthen their bonds with people outside their families.

One philanthropic ritual growing in popularity is something called Giving Circles. These are the reverse of Investment Clubs, in which groups of people meet regularly to collectively invest their money. In Giving Circles, people meet to give their money away.

It's a simple idea, which is one of its charms. Many circles meet monthly, often holding meetings while sharing a meal. Some include just a handful of close friends, while a few in Silicon Valley, which helped make this form of philanthropy trendy, have hundreds of members. The money mounts up: according to the New York Times,

giving circles have donated more than \$44 million since 2000.

The idea is to move beyond your pet charities. Research charities from the local to the global, then pool your resources for a common goal. Unless your bank account rivals that of Bill Gates, it's hard to feel like you've made a real difference when you write

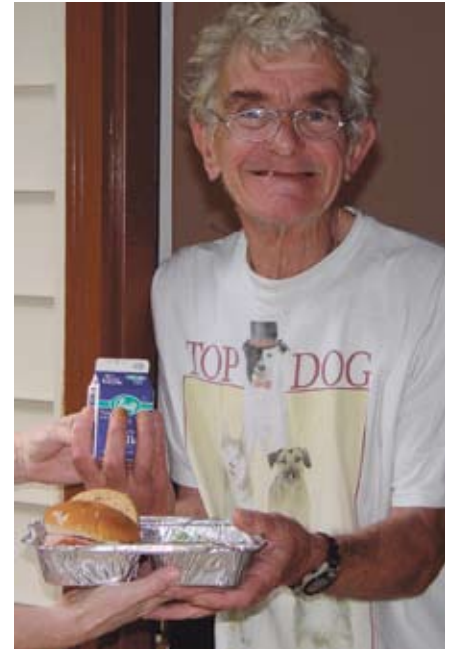
“most people are hungry for friendships that progress beyond gossip”

a check by yourself. But if your Giving Circle commits to a handful of causes and embraces them with passion, you will make a difference and feel like a player. You could, for example, become the sustaining force

behind a charity in your town that really changes lives.

I love this concept because I believe that living a compassionate life transforms us for the better and makes us happier. I also believe most people are hungry for friendships that progress beyond gossip and small talk. Uniting with others on a regular basis to achieve a goal that is bigger than oneself fits my broad definition of a spiritual ritual.

For the nitty gritty on how they work and how to set one up, visit an excellent website, www.givingforum.org/givingcircles.



For an extended version of this story, including “Giving Circles Part 2: Chicks with Checks,” “Trickle Down” and “Save the World Circles,” visit SimpleLiving.org » Services » Archives » Whose Birthday? 2006.

(from Meg Cox's Ritual Newsletter, December, 2005. For a free subscription, email FamilyRituals@aol.com.)

Meg's “The Book of New Family Traditions” is available from Alternatives. See p 28.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also like:

Growing Compassionate Kids
Raising Kids Who Will Make a Difference

**GIFT
IDEA**

Give a gift certificate for an outing together. (January and February are the perfect times still to be festive.)

**GIFT
IDEA**

When we celebrate a birthday, we are careful to give what the person really wants or needs. Is there any doubt what Jesus wants from us? He insists that in order to give to him, we must find him in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned.

By helping to provide a goat for a farmer in Honduras, a decent home for a family in rural Mississippi, or food for those who are victims of war, you can give Jesus a birthday gift he really wants.

Contact one or more of these organizations to get more information on how you can give money, time and skills to those in need. (Information is accurate to the best of our knowledge. Please contact us with additions and corrections.)

ALTERNATIVE GIFTS INTERNATIONAL

Helps organize "alternative giving" events
Education, advocacy & fundraising to alleviate
poverty & restore the environment.
1103 Topeka • PO Box 3810 • Wichita, KS 67201
800-842-2243 • www.AltGifts.org

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES WORLD RELIEF OFFICE

Seeks to combat hunger and poverty
P.O. Box 851 • Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851
610-768-2202 • www.ABCWR.org

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

Seeks to root out the causes of violence that lie in
poverty and imbalance of wealth
1501 Cherry St. • Philadelphia, PA 19102
888-588-AFSC • www.AFSC.org

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Works to free prisoners of conscience and end
torture and executions around the world
322 Eighth Ave. • New York, NY 10001
212-633-4256 • www.AmnestyInternational.org

A GREATER GIFT (SERRV INTERNATIONAL, INC.)

Promotes the social and economic progress
of people in developing regions of the world
500 Main St. • P.O. Box 365 • New Windsor, MD 21776
800-423-0071 • www.SERRV.org

BREAD FOR THE WORLD

Promotes education and legislation on issues of international and
domestic hunger and justice
50 F St. NW Suite 500 • Washington, DC 20001
800-822-7323 • www.Bread.org

CALL TO RENEWAL

A faith-based movement to overcome poverty
2401 15th St. NW • Washington, DC 20009
202-328-8745 • www.CallToRenewal.org
ctr@calltorenewal.org

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

Assists the poor and disadvantaged outside of
this country
209 West Fayette St. • Baltimore, MD 21201
410-625-2220 • www.CatholicRelief.org

CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DOC) BASIC MISSION FINANCE

Provides health, healing, education and
hope to marginalized people
P.O. Box 1986 • Indianapolis, IN 46206
317-635-3113 • www.DOCBMF.org

CHRISTIAN REFORMED WORLD RELIEF COMMITTEE

A relief, development and educational ministry
2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE • Grand Rapids, MI 49560
800-552-7972 • www.crwrc.org

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN EMERGENCY DISASTER FUND

Provides necessities and rebuilds
resources for victims of disaster
1451 Dundee Ave. • Elgin, IL 60120
800-323-8039 • www.Brethren.org

CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Works in partnership with the needy while
providing immediate necessities
P.O. Box 968 • Elkhart, IN 46515
800-297-1516 • www.ChurchWorldService.org

ECHO (Education Concerns for Hunger Organization)

Provides agricultural information and seeds to those
working with farmers in the Third World
17430 Durrance Rd. • North Fort Myers, FL 33917
941-543-3246 • www.ECHO.org

EPISCOPAL RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

Ministers to those who are hurt, forgotten, dispossessed,
sick or in need of training and education
815 Second Ave. • New York, NY 10017
800-334-7626 • www.EpiscopalRelief.org

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA WORLD HUNGER APPEAL

Works toward development, relief and justice
8765 West Higgins Rd. • Chicago, IL 60631
800-NET-ELCA • www.ELCA.org/WorldHunger

FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION (FOR)

Works to achieve a just and peaceful world community
Box 271 • 523 North Broadway • Nyack, NY 10960
914-358-4601 • www.Fellowship.org

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Works in partnership with poor people around
the world to build simple, decent houses
121 Habitat St. • Americus, GA 31709
800-HABITAT (422-4828) • www.Habitat.org

HEIFER PROJECT INTERNATIONAL

Provides livestock and training to needy
families in 107 countries
P.O. Box 808 • Little Rock, AR 72203
800-422-0474 or 800-422-1311 • www.Heifer.org

KOINONIA PARTNERS

Teaches peace, kindness, sharing and simplicity; sells
peanut and peanut products grown by the community
Americus, GA 31709
912-924-1224 • www.KoinoniaPartners.org

MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Provides relief, services and development in 50 countries
PO Box 500 • Akron, PA 17501-0500
717-859-1151 • www.MCC.org • mailbox@mcc.org

MERCY CORPS INTERNATIONAL

Promotes self-reliance, productivity, human
dignity among the world's poor
3030 SW First Ave. • Portland, OR 97201
503-242-11032 • www.MercyCorps.org

MINISTRY OF MONEY

Helps individuals explore, understand and
address issues of money and faith
11315 Neelsville Church Rd. • Germantown, MD 20876
301-428-9560 • www.MinistryOfMoney.org

OXFAM AMERICA

Promotes self-help development and
disaster relief projects worldwide
26 West Street • Boston, MA 02111-1206
617-482-1211 • www.Oxfam.org



PAX CHRISTI USA

Works for peace for all humankind
532 W 8th Street • Erie, PA 16502
814-453-4955 • www.PC-USA.org

PRESBYTERIAN HUNGER PROGRAM

Responds to hunger and poverty through education,
direct food relief, development assistance, lifestyle
integrity and influencing public policy
100 Witherspoon St • Louisville, KY 40202-1396
800-334-0434 • www.PCUSA.org/Hunger

REFORMED CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Responds to immediate relief needs and seeks solutions to long-
term problems through development, rehabilitation and advocacy
P.O. Box 19381 • Newark, NJ 07195-1938
800-264-7249 • www.RCA.org/CWS

TEN THOUSAND VILLAGES

Provides fair income for Third World artisans
through a nonprofit marketing program
P.O. BOX 500 • Akron, PA 17501-0500
717-859-8100 • www.TenThousandVillages.com
inquiry@villages-mcc.org

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES OFFICE FOR POVERTY AND HUNGER

Seeks to end childhood hunger and
provides lifestyle education
700 Prospect Ave-9th Floor • Cleveland, OH 44115
216-736-3290 • www.UCC.org

UNITED METHODIST COMMITTEE ON RELIEF

Responds to Christ's command to feed the hungry, care
for the sick and welcome the stranger in our midst
General Board of Global Ministries
475 Riverside Dr. Room 1439 • New York, NY 10115
800-841-1235 or 800-554-8583 UMCOR@gbgm-umc.org

Gifts of Kindness

by Becky White



I have a kindergartner, and we wanted to make sure he knew whose birthday it was.

This year at the start of Advent, we wrapped a shoe box in gift wrap and cut a small hole in the top. Placed a bow and label, "To Jesus, From Gary, Becky, Henry and Anna." Then each week each of us tried to do at least three special acts of kindness. These things had to be out of the ordinary.

In other words, mom can't say "I washed everyone's laundry" because that is something she does anyway as a mom. Each act of kindness was recorded on a small piece of paper, with the "doer's" name on it, and placed inside the box.

“On Christmas morning we opened the box and read the messages out loud.”

Then on Christmas morning, we opened the box and read the messages out loud. It was good for our kids to see that we really did put some effort into giving a "present" to Jesus. And it was also good for them to hear the different "acts of kindness" so that they get additional/new/more ideas of things they could do themselves all throughout the year. We will definitely do this again next year! Happy New Year!

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

Family Stories and Games

365 Unplugged Family Fun Activities

Giving While Spending

As a family, select a cause or organization to support with money you collect during Advent and the twelve days of Christmas. Choose a percentage early in the season (from 25% to 100%). Then give that amount every time you spend any money for Christmas... in addition to the amount you normally give away. Decorate a can to hold the money. Put it on display. 20 bucks on a tree? Then \$___ goes in the can. This money is not a penalty; rather it serves as a reminder and aid to help others. Donate the money on Epiphany, the day the Magi offered their gifts to Jesus.

Reducing Christmas Chaos

by Ann Dieleman

After working for years to REALLY CELEBRATE Christmas and not get caught in the frenzy of consumerism, this year I tried something different that seemed to work.

I didn't want to repeat last year's experience on Christmas morning the chaos of unwrapping so many gifts (even small, well-chosen tokens of love) with my husband, father, children, and grandchildren that we couldn't appreciate each one. We couldn't even remember who gave us what. Even the adults were hyper, whiny, and confused.

So I decided to give and receive no gifts on Christmas Day. I wanted my gifts to be gifts of love, not obligation, and not dictated by a retailer's calendar. I am spacing out my gifts. No one knows what they will get or when. There's a lot more mystery and it feels a lot more like love.

At Thanksgiving I exchanged gifts with my daughter from Pittsburgh (who couldn't

come for Christmas). In mid-December I made gingerbread with my older grandkids and gave each a Christmas storybook when I had time to read to them. Before Christmas when my grandkids spent the night, I gave them new pj's and cuddled with them the next morning. When we travel to Guatemala in March I hope to bring back colorful scarves or necklaces and give them away while I'm still excited about the trip. These Fair Trade items are much more educational and meaningful than mass-produced stuff.

This all leaves me free on Christmas Day for church and family gatherings, eating, sledding, long walks and talks. Free to REALLY CELEBRATE that God comes to us right where we are! Hallelujah!

“No one knows what they will get or when. There's a lot more mystery.”

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also like:
[Unclutter Your Home](#)
[Alternative Giving Cards](#)
[Gratitude Card](#)

Enough, Already!

by Mary Sharon Moore

I accomplished my Christmas shopping in under three minutes this year, standing in one aisle in my local grocery store. I bought rice and beans for all my family and friends (nice rice and spicy beans), and am making a donation of money in their name to a favorite charity.

Why rice & beans? That's a REAL world menu. That's what 2/3's of the world's population eats daily.



If you enjoyed this article, you'll also like:
[Meal by Meal](#)
["Vision of Simpler Living" DVD](#)

Christmas Year-round

by Gail McDonough

My oldest son, 40, and his family are really working on “simplifying” and asked our entire family and extended family to consider buying less and thinking about how they could celebrate Christmas differently.

He drew my name in the adult gift basket and was thrilled because I agree completely with him on working toward changing our “traditions.”

He made me a “Monthly Christmas Gift Coupon Book” as my gift. It was very nicely done on his computer with borders on each month’s coupon. The following are his gifts to me for the coming year. Each page has in bold capital letters “Monthly Christmas Gift Coupon. . . Presented to MOM.”

This Certificate entitles the bearer to. . .

- One trip to a museum of your choice.
- One night out for dinner.
- One trip to the Botanical Gardens.
- One nature walk.
- One movie at the theater (includes popcorn and drink).
- One afternoon cleaning your house.



- One game night.
- One lunch at the St. Louis Bread Co.
- One job of your choice I can assist you with.
- One afternoon together just to talk.
- To help you prepare for a family gathering by coming a few hours early.
- An activity or “together time” of your choice.

I particularly appreciate this gift because he lives far enough away that I often do not see him every month and it is the gift of time and presence.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

“More-with-Less Christmas” audio CD

Christmas Trilogy audio CD

Prayerful Santa and other Greeting Cards

Faith, Hope & Love (coupon book)

Discover NO COST Gifts!

by Richard L. Haid

This Christmas, Hanukkah or Kwanzaa season offers a unique opportunity to create and give "no cost" gifts as you review the purpose of Christmas and how you celebrate it. For many the Christmas season is not as joyous as they would like it to be. They may have fewer financial resources and be more cautious about using credit, and feel less abundant about life in general. In the process of discovering your "no cost" gifts and rethinking how you want to celebrate Christmas, you may discover new skills and interests in the process.

EXAMPLES of "no cost" gifts:

1. Gifts of Experience:

Taking others to see Christmas lights, Christmas Eve services, relatives, museums.

Encourage and listen to others tell about their favorite Christmas experiences and help them to write about it.

Your gift possibilities:

2. Gifts You Have Created or Recycled:

Books, CDs, and videos from the library, recycled gifts or from your possessions, crafts from nature, wood carving, paintings, personalized screen savers, and your baked treats.

Write booklets of your favorite recipes, stories, jokes, life experiences, wisdom, and poetry.

Your gift possibilities:

3. Other Kinds of Gifts, such as back and foot rubs, breakfast in bed, car washing, or garage cleaning:

Your gift possibilities:

Ways that you may modify, and yet enhance your Christmas celebration this year:

Richard L. Haid, Ph.D., is an Adult Mentor in Hamilton, OH. Learn more at adultmentor.com. His motto is "Helping guide persons into the Abundance of the Third Quarter of Life. Don't miss it!"

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:
The Art of Debt-Free Living
Unclutter Your Life
Let's Talk about Christmas

Gifts of Ourselves Certificate

(several certificates could be assembled into a coupon book)

<i>For Someone Special</i>	
This certificate entitles	

to	-----
from	-----

Reduce, Reuse & Remember New Cards From Old

by Gretchen Denton

Many times I don't have enough December hours to savor the Christmas cards we receive. I read the notes, glance at the cards, and toss them in a basket "to look at later." Then, at the end of the season I bundle all the cards and stack them on an empty shelf in the basement. It isn't long before I have four years of old cards that I don't want to discard.

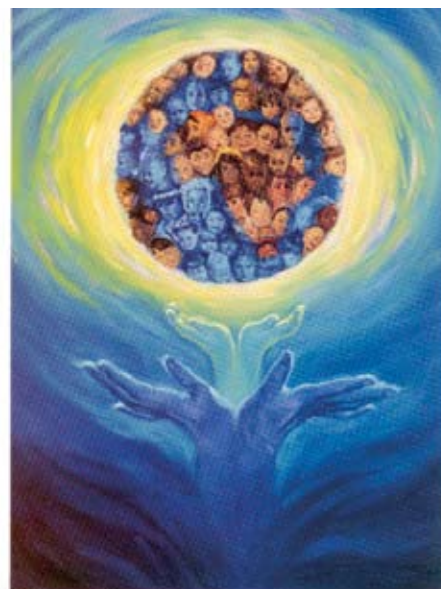
One of this summer's hottest days I started making new cards from those old ones, working in the basement where it was cool. It gave me another opportunity to re-read those cards and to appreciate their beauty. Here's how I enjoyed remembering friends and family while creating new cards.

I cut from the card a picture that would fit on a folded piece of card stock. All the cards, whether they were horizontal or vertical were made the same size of approximately 4x5 inches so each sheet of the recycled card stock yielded two cards and cards of this size fit in ready-made envelopes. I used envelopes that come from organizations that send you "free" Christmas cards

because I don't usually send those unrequested cards.

You could use a rubber stamp for your message but I prefer to print mine with the computer. I like to decorate the paper where the cut-out from the old card will be placed before I attach the cut-out. Spatter-painting using screen and tooth brush, coloring abstract designs with crayons, colored pencils or markers, using a rubber stamp over and over to create a pattern, marbleizing paper by rolling paint covered marbles over paper are some options. You can match the predominant color of your cut-out with the design you apply to the one side of the paper. I used an iron covered with aluminum foil, colored on the hot iron with old crayons that melted, and then pressed the paper with the foil-covered iron to create a design unique for every card.

After applying the cut-out I signed the back of my cards with my personal logo, a circle of red and green with arrows to represent my form of recycling.



This would be a project to do with children when you simplify your Christmas giving and don't need to be spending days in the mall. For a neater look, adults can do the cutting up of old cards (and re-reading the enclosed messages) or it could be a kids project entirely to make just a few cards for special friends. It can be a good way to spend time together, dabbling in color and pattern for the fun of it, and sharing parts of those cards too beautiful to toss in the trash or hide on a basement shelf.

To read an extended version of this article, including "Make Your Own Envelopes Too!" visit SimpleLiving.org » Services » Archives » Whose Birthday? 2006.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

Celebrate Simply
A Simple Christmas
Simply & Celebrate!

**GIFT
IDEA**

Make a colorful basket of organic fruit, jams, and pasta sauces. This not only can be enjoyed by all but also introduces new people to buying organics.

**GIFT
IDEA**

Peace in Any Language

by Jerry Wrenn

Here's an alternative gift idea that took on special meaning for me some years ago.

I designed a Peace Stick and made several for family and friends at Christmas. First, I went to the local Scouting Supply store, and bought a dozen walking staffs. I got a wood burning kit, and burned the words for "peace" into the stick, in 10-12 different languages.

I am not an "artsy" person, so it was a real effort. What made it really special for me, was that I was able to use my late dad's garage/workshop. It was almost like he was still present while I was working.

The next step would be to make my own walking sticks.

Czech

Ať mír vždy vládne na Zemi

Danish

Må fred herske på jorden

Dari

برقرارباد صلح در جهان

Divehi

މި ދުނިޔޭގައި ހަމަހަމަ ހިތްވަރު ހުރި ވާ

Dutch

Moge vrede heersen op aarde

Dzongkha

འཇམ་གླིང་འདི་ནང་ལུ་ བདེ་སྲིད་ལུ་གསུམ་ཚོགས་ཅུ་ཅིག།

"May Peace Prevail on Earth"

The Peace Sticks have been seen in ministers' offices, school classrooms, and even in a fundraiser walk for the homeless. I gave a labor of the heart, along with coffee cakes, made from a family recipe. It was very special.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

A Call to Peace

Recycled Crafts Box

"Spirit of Simplicity: Quotes and Art for Simpler Living and Global Justice" (paper and CD-ROM)

WORDS FOR PEACE

Hebrew - shalom (sah LOME)

Russian - mir (meer)

Greek - irene (ih RAY nay)

French - paix (peh)

Spanish - paz (pahs)

Arabic - shalaam (sha LA am)

Italian - pace (PAH chay)

Swahili - amani (ah MAHN ni)

German - friede (FREE duh)

Chinese - (ho ping)

Filipino - kapayapaan (kah pie YAH oah awn)

Norwegian - fred (Fred)

Hindi - (SHAN tee)

Japanese - (hey wah)

Polish - pokoj (poh k)

This list comes from "Welcoming the Prince of Peace: A Four-Session Activity Guide for Leaders of Older Children (Ages 9-11)" available free at SimpleLiving.org » Services » Archives » Christmas Packs » Gifts of Peace

GIFT IDEA

Think of what the person enjoys and give a gift certificate for that, e.g., concerts, yarn store, sporting goods, locally-owned restaurants, especially weekly music lessons for a child for a year.

GIFT IDEA

St. Nicholas on Parade

by The Rev. Celine A. Burke

Last year our parish took part in the Victorian Christmas parade in our town of Manistee, Michigan. Our float featured St. Nicholas in full costume and the children of the parish in Victorian costumes. Some of the children we dressed as wealthy children and others as poor children.

The next day, which was the Sunday closest to St. Nicholas day, St. Nicholas came to church and told the children stories about helping poor children. This way we help the children become involved with needy families. Visit SaintNicholasCenter.org



New Christmas Traditions You Can Share

by Karen Boe

We live with several animals at Schoenridge Farm in Northwest Missouri. One of our family traditions is to go out and give special treats to the animals before we have our own meal. Included in this is a Danish tradition of putting bread on the trees for the wild birds. We have the treat of watching them.

We cut a Red Cedar from our own land (there are plenty) instead of a traditionally decorated tree. Then, instead of gifts, we put woodland creatures (stuffed animals) under the tree to remind us to be mindful of the wild life with whom we share this planet.

We have quit buying traditional gifts even though we still have a thirteen-year-old home schooled daughter. She is VERY okay with our found or dumpster-dived objects and occasionally we purchase from a fair trade organization or especially local artisans.

If you enjoyed this article, you'll also enjoy these resources:

The Conscious Consumer

Bearing Gifts Does Not Make Us Wise

Buy Me Nothing, I'll Still Love You

By becoming a member of Alternatives, you help challenge the way our consumer society continues to usurp our holy days and exploit people and the environment. With your help, more people can experience the joy that comes from celebrating and living in ways that affirm all God's creation.

All Members Receive:

- Inside Info newsletter twice a year
- Samples of selected new resources, such as "Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?"
- Voting privileges for at-large board members
- Discounts on purchases (upon request, except on quantity prices)
- Copying privileges.
- and, of course, our quarterly catalog

See inside the back cover of our Resource Guide for details on BENEFITS, or visit Simpleliving.org, click Memberships.

"The Simple Liver" \$35. (\$25 for students and fixed income) MEMA

"The Non-conformer" \$50. (family) MEMB

"The Co-operator" \$100. MEMC

"Responsible Celebrator" \$250. MEMD

"The Downscaler" \$500. MEME

"The Community" Institutional Membership \$100 or more. MEMJ

Extended Memberships

Extended memberships are made once.

• Perpetual. \$2500. MEMM

• Dual Life. \$1500. MEML

• Life. \$1000. MEMF

Bring Simpler Living to Your Group!



If you want a live speaker, Alternatives will send you several prospects from your area.

Simpler Living Community Network provides volunteer speakers, workshop leaders, event organizers and discussion-makers.

If you want the convenience of a recorded speaker or workshop, order Alternative's Workshops-on-CD. (See pages 27 and 29.)

• "Living Simply and Loving It!" (\$10)

• "Unplug the Christmas Machine" (\$12, including Participant's Manual)

• "Let Jesus Come, Let Santa Go: Celebrating an Alternate Christmas" (3 CDs, \$20)

If you want to make a presentation, Alternatives has materials you can use in "Simple Living 101: Toolbook for activists shy or bold!" On paper (\$10) or CD-ROM (\$15)

If you want to stand ready to make presentations upon request within 50 miles of your home, join the Network. No cost or obligation. Free newsletter.

Other services include

- Free Resource Guides to hand out at an event you're organizing or attending
- Displays
- Consignment sales (books, videos, greeting cards, bumpers stickers, CD's. You select the items or we'll help.)

Call 800-821-6153 or email Alternatives@SimpleLiving.org

Alternatives' is a non-profit organization. Our services are FREE.

Greeting Cards (with envelopes)



FACES OF THE CHILDREN

"How can we turn away from the faces of the children? Faces bearing hunger and pain. Who will be the love in the hearts of the children? Who will make a difference in the future of the Earth? Is it you? Is it I? And when will we?" Blank inside. Full text enclosed. 8 for \$8. FoC

GIVE BIRTH TO THE DREAM

African mother and child. Inside: "Lift up your eyes upon this day breaking for you. Give birth again to the Dream." -- Maya Angelou. 8 for \$8. GBD



PRAYERFUL SANTA

Blank inside. 10 for \$10. PSCard-A

MADONNA AND CHILD

Bangladeshi mother and child. Inside: "It is true, then: all things are possible with God. May your world be filled with the hope, possibility and promise of this glorious season." 8 for \$6.50. MAC

SPIRIT OF SIMPLICITY GREETING CARDS

Send a simple message. Share values with style and tact. Blank inside. Card & envelope recycled paper - 100% pcw (post consumer waste) with soy-based ink.

\$1.50 each; any 8 for \$8.

Less Stuff. More Time

Love Our Mother Earth

Live Simply That Others May Simply Live

Non-Conform Freely

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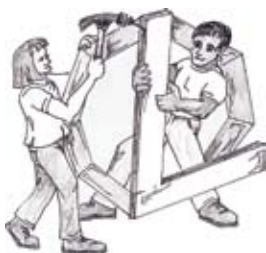
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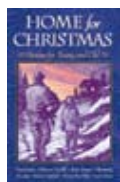


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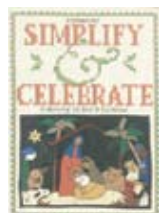


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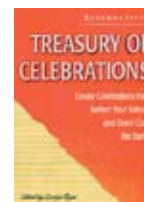
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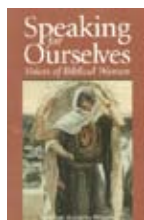


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