

Advent and Christmas Planning Quick Ideas

Introduction

Following are strategies and ideas for celebrating the seasons of Advent and Christmas with young people, families, and parish communities. Many of them can take place in gathered settings. Some can be adapted for use in the home.

Use these quick ideas as they are, or allow them to spark your creativity as you adapt them to your setting, your situation, and your parish community.

Two online resources can provide you with a wealth of additional material. The Saint Mary's Press Web site offers free downloadable resources. Go to www.smp.org and click on "free stuff," then follow the links under "complementary resources." The organization Alternatives for Simple Living is dedicated to challenging the commercialization of holidays. Its website is a treasure chest for Church ministers.

Activities and Strategies

Advent Buddies

Recruit older adults in the parish who are willing to partner with young people for weekly meetings and activities. During each week of Advent, bring them together for faith sharing, prayer, and guided conversation. They also might share a simple meal, make Christmas decorations or gifts, or bake cookies for shut-ins.

Advent Cards

Send postcards or notes to all young people in the parish during each week of Advent. Include a verse from the Sunday Scriptures, a reflection question or two, and suggestions for living out the message.

Advent Hopes

On or before the first Sunday of Advent, ask the young people to think about three hopes they have for the Advent season. For example, they might hope to find time to be quiet each day, or that their family will not be too stressed. Have them seal their hopes in an envelope and write their name and address on it. Between Christmas and New Year's Day, send the envelopes to them. Include a few reflection questions such as these:

- Which hopes were realized? Which were not? Why?

- What would you do differently if you could do Advent over again?
- What do you want to remember for next Advent?

(Whose Birthday Is It Anyway, pp. 16,18)

Advent Wreath Blessings

Rather than use a prepared series of Advent wreath blessings, have the group create its own. At a gathering on or before the first Sunday of Advent, divide the participants into four groups. Assign each group one of the four weeks of Advent and provide each person in the group with a copy of the readings for the day. Explain that they are to write a blessing for that day based on the readings. If you think it might be helpful, make available to them a variety of published blessings. You might want to have the blessings address a particular theme, such as ending war, family life, tolerance, Church vocations, or adolescent issues.

Alphabet Prayers

Before the first Sunday of Advent, have the young people develop a series of prayer themes, each beginning with a letter of the alphabet. For example, A might be "Angel Gabriel" or "anticipation;" B could spark a prayer about "blessings" or "birth." Help the teens find an appropriate scriptural passage and write a prayer on each theme. Compile this alphabet prayer list, assign each letter to a day, and send it to the teens and their families.

In some years Advent comprises fewer than twenty-six days and in other years, more, so you will have to make some adjustments depending on the calendar.

Alternative Gift Giving

Encourage families to get into the true spirit of the season by offering alternatives to the insanity and expense of seasonal commerce. Send home a copy of handout 1, "Alternative Gift-Giving Ideas." You might also post an enlarged copy in the parish gathering space, along with blank paper, so people can add their own ideas.

Baby Shower

In honor of the birth of the Christ child, host a baby shower. Use baby-themed decorations, and play games that might be used at baby showers. Ask the participants to bring a baby gift to the shower, as they normally would. You might also invite the entire parish to donate items that are necessities for infants and young children, such as diapers, jars of baby food, and baby wipes, shampoo, and bath products. Encourage families to go together to purchase more expensive items such as car seats, strollers, and high chairs. Donate the gifts to a local ministry that serves young mothers and their children.

Babysitting Service

As a service to families in the parish, sponsor a day close to Christmas when parents can drop off their young children for a day of fun, games, and movies, allowing parents to get some last-minute

shopping and wrapping done. Organize the day well in advance to allow time to recruit babysitters, plan activities, gather supplies, and so forth.

Boxing Day

The day after Christmas is known as Boxing Day, though the origin of the term is unclear. Celebrate the day by sponsoring a box drive at the parish. Ask people to drop off boxes of food for the local food pantry.

Buy-Nothing Day

As a protest against the commercialization of Christmas, encourage young people and their families to refrain from making any purchases on the day after Thanksgiving—the biggest shopping day of the year. Instead, you might want to sponsor a presentation on some aspect of justice in the marketplace, such as clothing made in sweatshops by children in foreign countries who are forced to work for pennies a day.

Campus Outreach

Provide some spiritual mentoring for college students from your parish via e-mail or regular mail during the season of Advent. Each week send a note with the readings for the week, some questions for reflection, and an action that is practical in their environment and will help them live the message of the Scriptures. Also include notes of encouragement for those who face finals and other pressures as the end of the semester nears.

You might also send campus care packages—treats and the necessities of college life. Solicit donations from the parish and engage the services of teens to pack and send the items.

Christmas Light Mixer

Handout 2, “Christmas Light Mixer,” can be found at the end of this chapter. Use it as part of a seasonal gathering to help people get to know one another in a fun and non-threatening way.

Christmas Memories

This is an ideal exercise for a gathering of families during Advent. Invite the participants to list the five things they liked most about the last five Christmases. Then have them classify the items as follows:

- If it cost money, put a dollar sign next to it.
- If it involved close friends or family, put an F next to it.
- If it was done alone, put an A next to it.
- If it was done in church, put a C next to it.
- If it was done in a store or a mall, put an S next to it.

After everyone has completed this task, direct them to list the five things they liked least about the last five Christmases. Using the same classifications, have them classify their answers.

Follow the exercise with a discussion about what makes Christmas truly meaningful and what causes stress for individuals and families. Encourage the participants to make some resolutions for the holiday season.

Christmas Tag Fund-raiser

After the holidays, collect used Christmas cards and ribbon from the parish. It's a great way for families to recycle their cards and the ribbon that adorned their packages. You will need the front part of the card only.

Cut out interesting parts of the picture to create gift tags. Some tags may consist of a large picture, others just a strip of border, others text. Cut index cards in the same size and shape to create two-part tags. Punch a hole in the top of the tag and index card and string ribbon through the hole. Package the tags in plastic sandwich bags and sell them next year as a fund-raiser. For variety use Christmas stencils or cookie cutters and scissors with design edges to create different shapes.

Christmas Object Prayer

Gather a variety of common Christmas items in a gift bag or box. Pass the items around the group and have each person choose one. Provide index cards, and tell the participants to write a one-line prayer on the index cards that focuses on the object they chose. These are some examples:

- a small light bulb: Thank you, God, for sending us the Christ Child, the light of the world.
- an ornament hook: God, help me hang in there until Christmas break!
- a bow or gift box: God, help me give the gift of myself in the coming year.

Create a Calendar

Work with the teens to create an Advent calendar for all young people. It might include a scriptural verse for each day, a reflection question, and an action that is appropriate and achievable. Send it to all the young people in the parish before the beginning of Advent.

If you have ample space in a gathering area, you might also create a wall-sized calendar for the parish, using one sheet of paper for each day of Advent. Be sure the words are large enough to be seen from a distance.

Cultural Celebrations

If ethnic traditions are part of the Christmas festivities for families in the parish, host an evening devoted to Christmas customs. Invite families in the parish to tell the young people about cultural practices of the season. For example, you might have a family with Mexican roots talk about Las Posada, invite an African-American family to share its observance of Kwanzaa, or ask a family whose ancestors came from Poland about the tradition of sharing *oplatki* at the Christmas meal.

Gift Box Questions

Use this activity as a mixer or conversation starter within a seasonal program. Collect small gift boxes, such as those made for jewelry. You will need as many boxes as you have participants. If you wish, decorate the covers only. Insert a slip of paper with a question or sentence starter on it in each box, then gather all the boxes in a basket or large gift box. Distribute the boxes among the participants and encourage them to share their answers with another person. When everyone has had a chance to answer the question, collect the boxes and redistribute them.

Develop questions or sentence starters that fit the theme of the season or the gathering. Suggested questions are listed below, but hundreds more are possible:

- The best gift I ever received was . . .
- The best gift I ever gave someone was . . .
- If I have one wish for the new year, it is . . .
- To me, the holiday season is . . .
- Something I would like to do differently next year is . . .
- If I were Mary, I probably would have . . .
- If I were Joseph, I probably would have . . .
- I think New Year's resolutions are . . .
- The character in the manger scene I am most like is . . . because . . .
- If I could change anything about our family's celebration of Christmas, it would be . . .

Gaudete Sunday Card to the Parish

The third Sunday of Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete (pronounced "gow-DAY-tay") is Latin for "rejoice," and the readings for the day reflect the joy of knowing that the birth of Jesus is imminent. It is the day when the pink candle on the Advent wreath is lit. Use large sheets of foam board (preferably in white or pink) hinged together to create this giant card from the young people to the parish. At the top of the "card," write the sentence starter "My church is a place of joy because . . ." Invite all the young people of the parish to add their thoughts and sign their names.

Gift Nametags

For any gathering around the holidays, use self-stick gift tags as nametags. You can create small groups by having a predetermined number of identical nametags and instructing the wearers to form a group. (Adapted from Mary Ann Hakowski, *Vine and Branches: Resources for Youth Retreats, volume 2*, p. 27)

The Giving Game

Give each person five pennies. Explain that the game has two parts. In the first part, they will have 3 minutes to give away as many pennies as they can. Since they will be receiving pennies as they give them, they must move quickly so that they are "penniless" when time is called.

In the second part of the game, the goal is to get as many pennies as possible. Explain that they will have 3 minutes to get pennies, but caution them to maintain safety at all times. The person with the most pennies when time is called wins.

Lead a discussion about what the participants learned from the activity. Be sure to highlight the following points:

- It is better to give than to receive.
- Those who give also receive.
- The act of giving can mean more than the gift.
- It is good to be around generous people.

(Adapted from Mary Ann Hakowski, *Vine and Branches, volume 2*, p. 26)

Giving Tree Transformation

If your parish or youth group has a giving tree for Advent, transform it into your parish Christmas tree when all the tags are removed. Place a selection of ornaments near the tree, and tell people to replace a gift tag with an ornament. The transformation will be gradual, but the symbolism rich.

Hollywood Holidays

View a variety of Christmas movies. Use questions like the following ones for discussion after each film:

- Does the film reflect the way the holiday season is for most people? Why or why not?
- How is Advent portrayed?
- What is the true meaning of Christmas according to the film?
- What role does spirituality or the Church play?
- What contribution can this film make to furthering Jesus's message of peace and justice?

House Blessing

As a way of marking the new year, suggest that families conduct a house blessing. Develop the theme that home is a sacred place and the family is the domestic Church. Offer families a prepared blessing, such as the ones that appear in Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1988). Another option is to involve teens and their families in writing the blessing, perhaps assigning each room of the house to a separate small group. Compile the blessings and send them to all families in the parish.

Jesse Tree

The Jesse tree is a rich symbol of the genealogy of Jesus and the miracle of the Incarnation. It takes its name from Isaiah 11:1: "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse." It consists of handmade symbols progressively added to a tree or a tree form, starting with the first Sunday of Advent and ending on Christmas Day.

In its complete form, each day of Advent is devoted to a person from the Old or New Testament who plays a vital role in salvation history. A scriptural reading highlights the theme associated with that person, and a symbol representing the person is added to a tree.

The project can be done with a group of teens or with an intergenerational group. It is also something you can send home for families to do together.

Keep Christ in Christmas

The Knights of Columbus sponsor the "Keep Christ in Christmas" campaign every year. They offer posters, mailing seals, calendars, and leaflets. Many local councils also sponsor essay contests for young people. Contact your local Knights of Columbus council for more information.

King Cake

In New Orleans, the feast of the Epiphany is the beginning of Carnival season, celebrated from January 6 until Mardi Gras, the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. Parties during Carnival often include the custom of the King Cake. The traditional cakes are round or oval and represent the crowns of the three kings. Decorative icings and sprinkles in the colors purple (for justice), green (for faith), and gold (for power) adorn the top of the cakes. The most important feature of the King Cake is the small figure of the infant Jesus found inside the cake. The person who discovers the baby in her or his piece of cake gets to be king or queen for the day, assuming imaginary rights of royalty. The lucky recipient also has the honor of giving the next party of the Mardi Gras season. A brief history of the King Cake custom and a recipe for this coffee-cake-type treat are available online. Type the words “King Cake” into any search engine.

Justice Carols

Alternatives for Simple Living has available justice-themed lyrics for traditional carols. Use the alternate texts for caroling or for entertainment during an Advent soup supper. Contact the organization. .

Lessons and Carols

The Festival of Lessons and Carols is a seasonal tradition in the Anglican communion and has been adopted and adapted by other Christian denominations. It consists of a series of nine readings from the Old and New Testaments alternating with hymns. The traditional readings include these:

- Genesis 3:8–15,17–19
- Genesis 22:15–18
- Isaiah 9:2,6,7
- Isaiah 11:1–3a,4a,6–9
- Matthew 2:1–12
- Luke 1:26–35,38
- Luke 2:1,3–7
- Luke 2:8–16
- John 1:1–14

Work with the teens of your parish to create an Advent service that incorporates these readings and traditional and contemporary hymns that are based on the texts. You can create a meaningful service using recorded music. However, if time allows, work with young musicians and your parish music director to develop choral and solo performances.

Modern Magnificat

Lead the young people in reading Mary’s song, the Magnificat, which can be found in Luke 1:46–55. Then, individually or in groups, have them rewrite the prayer in their own words. Collect these “modern Magnificats” into a booklet and distribute them.

New Year Prayer Vigil

Conduct a prayer vigil on New Year's Eve, ending at midnight with a communal prayer service. Follow the prayer service with a party or a lock-in for the young people of the parish.

Of Hands and Hearts

Sponsor a handmade-gifts day for the young people in the parish. Invite craftspeople from the parish to share their skills by leading a group of teens in a work project. For example, someone who is skilled in woodworking might help young people make and decorate a birdhouse or a planter. A person who likes to cook could lead a group in layering dry ingredients in a canning jar, with instructions for making soup, cookies, or special beverages. A person whose hobby is making scrapbooks might help teens creatively frame a photograph.

Paper Crane Tree

Paper cranes have become the symbol of peace throughout the world. Research the story of the paper crane and present it at an Advent gathering. Provide paper and instructions for the participants to make cranes. Instructions are available online or at your local library.

You might want to have each person write a prayer for peace on the paper before folding it into a crane. Hang the cranes on a tree in a parish gathering space. You could also incorporate the decoration of the tree into a prayer service for peace.

Peace Cards

Sponsor a card-making night where young people make cards with messages of peace and send them to political leaders. Encourage them to express their concerns about the state of the world as the world anticipates the birth of the Prince of Peace.

(Adapted from *Whose Birthday Is It Anyway*, p. 17)

Picturing the Spirit

Each person will need a camera for this activity. Tell the young people that they are to "picture the Spirit" of Christmas. That is, they are to find people, places, and events that capture the true spirit of Christmas and take a picture. Decide on a time frame, for example, one week starting on the feast of Saint Nicholas.

At a gathering later in Advent, create a collage together using the photos. Give each person a chance to explain how his or her photo captures the spirit of Christmas. Display the collage in a parish gathering space.

(Adapted from *Whose Birthday Is It Anyway*, p. 17)

Pinecone Reflections

Gather enough pinecones for everyone in the group. Invite the participants' reflections on the connection between the pinecones, themselves, and God. Be sure to cover the following points:

- The pinecone comes from an evergreen. Just as these trees are always green, they serve as a reminder that God's love is everlasting.

- The pinecone points down when it hangs on the tree, facing the earth. After it falls it often faces the sky, open to heaven. This reminds us of Jesus Christ, both human and divine, our link between heaven and earth.
- Just as no two pinecones are exactly alike, no two people are alike.
- Pinecones contain seeds—the promise of future growth. Each of us also holds promise for the future if we sow our seeds in the right soil.

(Adapted from Mary Ann Hakowski, *Vine and Branches, volume 2*, pp. 30–31)

Prayer Chain

This is a variation of the construction paper chain that many families make to count down the days until Christmas. Cut one-inch strips of construction paper using the colors of Advent: purple, blue, and pink. Each person or family will need one strip for each day, starting with the first Sunday of Advent and ending with Christmas Day. Have the participants write a short prayer request on each strip of paper. The prayers may be personal or may concern social and community issues. Glue the ends of the strips together to form a chain. Instruct them to hang the chain in a place where they will see it every day. Starting with the first Sunday of Advent, they should rip off one strip and say a prayer based on that request.

Presents for the Christ Child

Provide each person with a small gift box and a small sheet of paper. Choose a reading that speaks of service to others, such as Matthew 25:34–40; Mark 10:17–21; or John 13:3–5, 12–15. Tell the participants to think of a birthday present they would like to give the Christ Child. It should be something that addresses the reading from Matthew’s Gospel—service to God’s people. Some suggestions follow:

- I will give the money I earn from one shift at my job to a local group that serves poor people.
- I will ask my friends and family to clean out their closets. I will give the clothing to the organization that provides clothes for needy people.
- I will cut my grandmother’s grass for free all summer long.

Instruct the participants to write their birthday present on the piece of paper, fold it, and put it in the box. Have wrapping paper and ribbon available so they can wrap their presents. Place the birthday presents for Jesus under a tree in the worship space or around the manger.

After the holiday, encourage each participant to take her or his present home and put it in a place where it will be a constant reminder to make good on the promise.

Puzzlers

Have the teens create puzzles for young students using words common to Advent. For example, they might create a crossword puzzle, a word search, or jumbled words using terms like waiting, wreath, candles, John the Baptist, prepare, Isaiah, Gabriel, and so forth.

Regrets Only

As part of a celebration of the new year, have the participants make a list of regrets from the past year. Then have them ceremoniously tear the paper into shreds and throw the pieces in the air like confetti. Say a prayer of thanksgiving for new beginnings. You also might want to hold a reconciliation service as part of the celebration, giving people the opportunity to make things right with God and with others.

Rosary for Peace and Justice

Lead the young people in a rosary while helping them reflecting on Advent themes of peace and justice. A Rosary for Peace, with reflections from liturgical texts; A Scriptural Rosary for Justice and Peace, with biblical reflections; and Unity in Diversity: A Scriptural Rosary are all available from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). If you work with young adolescents, lead them through the rosary by doing one decade at a time, perhaps in successive meetings. You also might consider doing this prayer as part of an Advent retreat or day of reflection. In that case you might intersperse decades of the rosary throughout the event or even build the program on the theme of peace and justice.

Saint Nicholas

December 6 is the feast of Saint Nicholas, a fourth-century bishop known for his kindness and generosity. Have the young people research this saint in print and online resources. Have the teens create a play for younger students or a prayer service for their peers.

Seasonal Prayers

Have the participants work in small groups to write prayers to accompany the activities of the season in order to help themselves and their families remember the true meaning of the season. Compile the prayers and distribute them to families. You might address the following activities:

- hearing the Salvation Army “red kettle” bell
- waiting
- visiting Santa Claus
- hearing or singing Christmas carols
- decorating
- baking
- staying busy
- shopping
- setting up the crèche
- wrapping gifts
- writing Christmas cards

Stations of the Crib

As a counterpart to the traditional devotion known as the stations of the cross, the concept of stations of the crib has begun to take root. Using the readings from Advent and the Christmas

season, create your own set of stations as a gift to the parish. Use scriptural readings and short prayers, just as you would for the Lenten stations. The teens could act out parts of the story, or you might use appropriately themed works of art.

The Twelve Days of Christmas

The carol “The Twelve Days of Christmas” concerns the time between Christmas and January 6, the traditional date of the feast of the Epiphany. Though it seems like a nonsense song, some have suggested that it contains hidden instructions about the basic teachings of the Christian faith. The “true love” of the opening line is God. The recipient of the twelve gifts is anyone who is a believer. Whether or not the theory is true, you can use the concept as a way of teaching or reviewing important truths.

- Day 1: a partridge in a pear tree = Jesus Christ, whose birthday we celebrate on December 25, the first day of Christmas
- Day 2: two turtle doves = the Old and New Testaments
- Day 3: three French hens = the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and love.
- Day 4: four calling birds = the four Gospels
- Day 5: five gold rings = the first five books of the Old Testament, known as the Pentateuch or the Torah
- Day 6: six geese a-laying = the six days of Creation (Gen., chap. 1)
- Day 7: seven swans a-swimming = the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Day 8: eight maids a-milking = the eight Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–10)
- Day 9: nine ladies dancing = the nine fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:22)
- Day 10: ten lords a-leaping = the ten commandments (Exod. 20:1–17)
- Day 11: eleven pipers piping = the eleven faithful Apostles
- Day 12: twelve drummers drumming = the twelve doctrinal points in the Apostles’ Creed

(Adapted from Dennis Bratcher, “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” in *The Voice*, www.cresourcei.org)

Unexpected Walk

You will need a small slip of paper for each participant. Make an X on one slip and leave the others blank. Explain that the person who picks the X will be the group leader for 5 to 10 minutes. The leader can take the group wherever she or he wants to go (though you may want to set some boundaries), in whatever time frame. For example, the leader may decide to have the group sit quietly for a minute before starting the unexpected walk. Another leader might take the group back to the starting place, even though the walk is not over. The participants are to follow the leader and do whatever she or he says.

Distribute the papers to find the first leader. Collect the papers, and then redistribute them to find subsequent leaders.

After the walk, explain that the point of it was to be open to the unexpected. Ask the young people to point out some unexpected happenings in the story of Jesus’s conception and birth. Note that God’s plans for us require that we be open to the unexpected at all times.

Volunteer Giving Tree

Put together a booklet of groups and agencies that need volunteer help for the holidays and that welcome the help of teenagers. Distribute the booklets to the teens in your parish before the season begins.

Put up a tree in a gathering area of your parish. Cut out a supply of blank paper ornament shapes. Each time someone does volunteer work within or outside the parish, have that person write his or her name on an ornament, along with the activity and the date, and hang it on the tree. The goal is to fill up the tree with ornaments, each one representing a gift of self.

Welcome Home

Young people who are away at college generally come home for the holidays. Provide opportunities for them to connect with one another and seek out occasions to minister to them after the intensity of finals, papers, and other end-of-semester pressures. They could also provide extra help with chaperoning and organizing Advent projects for junior high and high school students.

Wheel of Advent

Use this takeoff on the popular game show Wheel of Fortune to help focus a group at the beginning of any gathering. Choose common Advent scriptural verses, such as "Prepare the way of the Lord" (Luke 3:4) or "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14). Write each letter of the verse on an index card and tape the cards to a wall with the letters facing toward the wall. Use small candies such as M&M's or Skittles as currency. Make a copy of resource 1, "Wheel of Advent," and have someone randomly select a slip and guess a letter. Follow the rules of the television game.

If you have a large group, you may need to have more than one game going at the same time.

Whose Birthday Is It Anyway?

Since 1973 Alternatives for Simple Living has been encouraging responsible celebration and protesting the commercialization of Christmas. Each year Alternatives publishes a pamphlet titled "Whose Birthday Is It Anyway?" that includes actions for each day of Advent, lists ideas for alternative gifts, and offers ways to keep the true meaning of Christmas alive.

Alternative Gift-Giving Ideas

- When giving gifts, consider these three questions:
 - * Does this gift reflect my values?
 - * Does this gift encourage passivity rather than activity? dependence rather than self-reliance?
 - * Does this gift stimulate spiritual, mental, or intellectual growth?
- Find out where in the area crafts and clothing from developing countries are being sold. Some churches sponsor Alternatives Fairs around the holidays. Purchasing your gifts at such an event supports craftspeople, not corporations. Your diocesan office of peace and justice may be able to help you locate such items.
- Make baked goods, craft items, or Christmas decorations for family and friends. Most magazines available in the supermarket include ideas for all ages.
- Create a coupon book good for various services. For example, a book for a grandparent from a teenager might include coupons for car washes, snow shoveling, garage cleaning, lawn care, a private piano recital, updated photographs, a CD of the grandparent's favorite songs, and so on.
- Create a book of favorite prayers. Each person writes a prayer or contributes a favorite prayer. These are then compiled and given to friends and relatives.
- Donate money to a charity in the name of the recipient. Many organizations will send a note to the person in whose name the gift was given or send the donor a card that can be personalized and sent.
- Give vouchers that substitute money spent on a person to time spent with that person. You might want to specify an event or an activity.
- Give a plant and directions for its care. You might want to start cuttings from your favorite plants well before the holidays and share them as gifts.
- Buy only three gifts for each person in the family, recalling the three gifts that Jesus received from the Magi. Make finding the gifts the exciting part of Christmas morning. Put together a treasure hunt that will lead each person to his or her gifts.
- Write personal notes to people who deserve special thanks, encouragement, or affirmation for what they've done in the past year. Deliver them in person.
- Make it a point to give these ten priceless gifts as frequently as you can:
 - * the gift of listening
 - * the gift of a compliment
 - * the gift of showing affection
 - * the gift of laughter
 - * the gift of cheerfulness
 - * the gift of doing a favor
 - * the gift of play
 - * the gift of contact
 - * the gift of time
 - * the gift of prayer

- Wrap packages in newspaper or paper bags. Use last year's cards to decorate the packages.
- Make "promise boxes." Decorate a gift box and fill it with items that symbolize promises of future services. Here are some examples:
 - * a spoon: a promise to make a batch of the recipient's favorite cookies
 - * a pen: a promise to write a long letter
 - * a map: a promise to explore a new hiking trail or area of the city
- Only buy gifts made by and sold through companies with a proven record of ethical labor practices, fair wages, concern for sustainability, and environmental responsibility. Make it a family project to research manufacturers and distributors before the shopping season begins in earnest.
- Fill a jar with kind thoughts, quotes, and affirmations. Decorate the lid. Attach a gift card telling the recipient to take out one a day and reflect on it. Suggest that it be posted in a place where she or he will see it frequently, such as on a locker door, in a day planner, or on the bathroom mirror.
- Make a large calendar or buy one with large spaces. Note significant events such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, and so forth, on the appropriate dates and decorate them. Add clever sayings, messages, quotes, and poems.
- Give one thousand dollars in play money along with a list of your services and the cost of each. For example, a night of babysitting might cost twenty dollars. Shoveling snow from the driveway might cost forty dollars. The play money can be redeemed all year round.

(Some of these ideas are adapted from *Whose Birthday Is It Anyway?* pp. 4, 14)

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handout 2

Christmas Light Mixer

Directions: Find someone who fits each description below and have that person sign accordingly. Each person may sign your sheet only once.

is wearing red or green _____

has a pet with a funny name _____

finished Christmas shopping before December 15 _____

is involved in a holiday concert or production _____

earns money at a job _____

is traveling over the holidays _____

has or had braces _____

plays a team sport _____

has relatives out of town _____

likes eggnog _____

had at least one Christmas cookie today _____

knows at least one verse of "Joy to the World" _____

has or had an Advent wreath at home _____

went or will go to midnight Mass _____

has seen at least one TV special or movie on a holiday theme this year _____

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resource 1

Wheel of Advent

Directions: Cut apart as scored. Put the slips of paper in a cup, bag, or bowl so that the person who is choosing cannot see them.

1 candy

1 candy

2 candies

2 candies

2 candies

3 candies

4 candies

5 candies

5 candies

5 candies

5 candies

5 candies

Lose a turn

Lose a turn

Lose a turn

Bankrupt

Bankrupt

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