

Reclaiming Christmas

Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?

The day after Christmas many of us vow that “next Christmas is going to be different!” We think that we will slow things down, not get trapped into racing from store to store, not wear ourselves out physically, emotionally, financially and spiritually trying to be in so many places, do so many things, and be in the “holiday spirit”. (This can be true for individuals with their families, or for church staffs planning the church’s calendar.) How do we savor the expectant “waiting” of Advent? How do we live out Christmas as Jesus’ birthday, instead of as a commercial holiday?

Well, Christmas is coming again. Why not make plans to refocus on the true meaning of the season? Discern what it means to you to live out the Advent and Christmas season with integrity in your home or in your church. You don’t have to do everything listed below, but try at least the first step.

First, go to God in prayer. Give thanks to God for the gift of Jesus. Acknowledge to God how difficult it can be to keep the focus on the “reason for the season.” Ask for God’s guidance. Reflect in God’s presence on what is important to you about the season. Pray for those for whom this may be a difficult time of year. And then give this year’s season into God’s hands.

Second, get together with your family (or a friend, or if you work in a church have a staff meeting) and talk over what is good about your holiday traditions and what is not as good. Decide what really honors God’s great gift of Jesus Christ to us, and what does not. Don’t be surprised if you have different ideas about what belongs in each of these categories. Where there is common agreement that something needs to be changed or eliminated, make plans on how this is going to be accomplished. For example: Too many nights out? Agree to some criteria for making decisions on whether to go or not to go. Consider the following to get your focus:

- How does what we are doing square with our values and the fact that it is Jesus’ Birthday we would like to be celebrating?
- Evaluate past practices in light of these values.
- Make specific plans to redirect your practices to reflect these values.

And what about gifts? Here are guidelines that you might find helpful:

1. **GIVE TO THOSE JESUS CAME TO SERVE:** Jesus was quite clear that he had a special concern for those who lived on the edges of society and acceptability. So one way we might honor his gift to us is by diverting some of our Christmas dollars to help those in need. There is no lack of possibilities here. The Presbytery has some suggestions about supporting mission in Guatemala, Malawi, and within Western NC. You will also have ideas about gifts for those in your own community and neighborhood who are in need.

2. **GIVE YOURSELF:** This might be the most precious and difficult gift to give to someone you love. Giving your presence instead of presents. Giving time instead of trinkets. What could this look like? Spending additional time with God in prayer or worship this season as your gift to Christ. Volunteering with a mission in your church or community serving those in need. Really thinking through what your loved one might want, and it might mean that instead of going to a store or shopping online, you give them a coupon for cooking a meal, giving a back rub, providing free babysitting, or writing a poem or letter that tells them what you most appreciate about them. The possibilities are endless!
3. **BUY WITH CONSCIENCE:** Unfortunately we live in a world which can now produce goods that are inexpensive to purchase but which are, in fact, very expensive in terms of human life and environmental health. Many of the clothes we wear and the electronics that we use are made by people in other countries who are paid subsistence wages and work in inhuman conditions (seven days a week in factories where they are locked in, for instance). There are some wonderful gifts that you can buy, knowing that those who produced them are being treated with dignity. Two resources are listed below:
 - Visit shops operated by Ten Thousand Villages, a Christian ministry that works with cooperatives around the world. There are four in our area: Montreat (Montreat Conference Center); Asheville (10 College Street); Hickory (Unique World Gifts, 2751 North Center Street); Charlotte (Cotswold Village Shops, 300 S. Sharon Amity & Randolph).
 - Buy fair trade products, such as coffee, food, clothing, or other gifts via “Enough for Everyone” programs www.pcusa.org/enough, or via one of the twenty global partners which are identified at www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace (look under “Global Marketplace” and click on “Shop the Global Marketplace” to see the list).

Alternative gift cards for some of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina’s missions are available through the presbytery office. Contact Lisa Pressley at 828-438-4217 ext. 12, or lpresley@presbyterywnc.org.

Other helpful websites:

www.newdream.org/resources/publications Resources

www.pcusa.org/justliving Ideas for reclaiming seasons

www.pcusa.org/enough “Enough for Everyone” resources
(Presbyterian Coffee Project, Sweat-Free T-Shirts, Oikocredit, Global Marketplace, Electric Stewardship, Eco-palms)

www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace and under “Global Marketplace” click on “Shop the Global Marketplace” to view the list.

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Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway? Order form for 2016

A while back someone came up with three helpful gift-giving guidelines:

- 1. GIVE TO THOSE JESUS CAME TO SERVE:** Although Jesus came for us all, his life and teachings reflect a special concern for those on the margins of society.
- 2. GIVE YOURSELF:** This might be the most precious and difficult gift to give to someone you love. Your presence instead of presents. Your time instead of trinkets.
- 3. BUY WITH CONSCIENCE:** There are some wonderful fair trade gifts that you can buy, knowing that those who produced them are being treated with dignity.



Each year the Presbytery highlights a few missions around the world where gifts would offer hope and help to those in need. The following pages describe these gifts for 2016. (Note the option with a coloring card for children to purchase.) For a sample packet of gift cards that support some of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina's missions, contact Lisa Pressley (828/438-4217 ext.12; lpresley@presbyterywnc.org).

Churches can order a sample set and multiple order cards to display. If a church is having an Alternative Gift Fair or an emphasis on "giving gifts that give twice," we can provide cards for display. We do ask that, as much as possible, you order the number of cards you think your church will need; we will send more if you run out. Or you can take orders and we'll fill the order. Order forms can be used by individuals as well as congregations. (If you have a color printer, you can also download the cards and inserts yourself from the presbytery website www.presbyterywnc.org and click on Reclaiming Christmas.)

The sample order form below is for reproduction.

Please complete my order for the following Christmas cards

For Malawi, Africa:

- Building HOPE-Ebenezer School (\$10)
 Nkhoma Hospital-Rural health & medicine (\$10)

For Guatemala:

- Microloan Project (\$10)
 Healthy Communities(water filters/stoves) (\$10)

For Presbytery of WNC:

- Building HOPE - for Camp Grier (\$10)

Children's Gift Options: (\$2 each)

- Children's Cards (# of cards should equal # of stickers)
 Guatemalan Children's Nutrition sticker (\$2 each)
 Malawian Children's Nutrition sticker (\$2 each)
 Mosquito Net sticker (\$2 each)
 Guatemala Education Scholarship sticker (\$2 each)

Please send my completed order to:

Name : _____

Address : _____

Address : _____

In the event of a question regarding your order, please provide a **Contact Number:** _____

E-mail Address: _____

Special Instructions: _____

Remit order form to:

Lisa Pressley
PWNC
114 Silver Creek Rd
Morganton, NC 28655
lpresley@presbyterywnc.org



