

Advent: A Time of Giving

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Several years ago in an article in *USA Weekend* (October 15-17, 1999), the question was asked: “What do entertainment superstars do with all their millions?” Some of the answers were: “Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has built a fortune in real estate, loves antique Holland & Holland leather suitcases, some of which cost up to \$2,500. Jerry Seinfeld, a serious collector, is the proud owner of 25 Porsches, including the first and last built air-cooled 911s (the “first” being Dr. Porsches own). Demi Moore buys dolls to expand her collection of 2,000-plus. She spent \$15,000 in a 45-minute private visit to a Gucci boutique in Cannes and once dropped some \$60,000 in a visit to the Santa Monica Antiques Market.”

These are the role models for our children and youth (and adults)!

The challenge to lead people to a life of generosity and simplicity is growing more and more difficult when we live in the midst of this culture of “what’s-in-it-for-me.” Especially at this time of year when children’s uppermost topic of conversation is “what I want for Christmas.” Do we constantly help them to look at the flip side and ask, “what am I giving for Christmas?”

As parents and catechists, can we utilize some of the following activities to lead children to a life of simplicity, generosity and gift-giving?

- **Have a family Piggy Bank.** Special, specific times can be set aside for putting coins into the charity box, perhaps on Sunday or at holiday time. Donations can also be made by anyone at anytime – especially in celebration of happy events or when receiving good news (or a good grade on a test). Each time the family charity box is filled up, you can have a family meeting to decide where the funds will be donated.

- **Two for one.** Begin a custom that when you purchase certain things for your family, you will purchase two – one for yourselves and one for the poor. E.g.: each time you purchase a jar of peanut butter, purchase two. One goes into a bag in the trunk of the car. When the bag is filled, deliver it to a local food pantry or soup kitchen.
- **Don't forget the little things.** Many people give away an old suit, dress, or sweater, but never think of smaller items that are always needed. The next time you and your children gather your old clothes to give away, include a good pair of socks...or toothpaste, soap, shampoo, toilet paper.

When you teach your children that giving is more than emptying closets of unwanted clothes, but is something that can be tailored to meet real human needs, you remind them to be thoughtful and respectful of the people who will receive their gifts, and grateful for the opportunity to share.

- **Be a tithing family.** Each month decide to give a percentage of salary/earnings and allowance (everyone contributes from whatever they have) or a portion of what the family would allocate for entertainment or treats that month. Decide as a family where the money will go. Make it different each month (becoming aware of more and more people who need our concern and care).
- **Every day.** Empty your pockets and purses of change at the end of every day (or designate one day a week) and collect it in a jar. At the end of Advent, give the money to a food pantry or homeless shelter.
- **Simple meal.** One night a week eat a simple meal. It might consist of cereal, milk and fruit or soup and crackers. Whatever money you save can be donated to a soup kitchen.
- **Garage Sales.** Go shopping at garage sales. For everything you buy for yourself, buy another item to be donated to the needy.

Family Ideas for Generosity for Each Day of Advent and the Twelve Days of Christmas

(These ideas can be put into a calendar format. Parishes can publish a week's ideas at a time in the Sunday bulletin, via email, on the parish website, etc.)

1. Give up dessert at dinnertime tonight. Donate the money saved to a group that feeds the hungry.
2. Visit a lonely person in your neighborhood.
3. Gather items for small gift bags for a homeless shelter: soap, shampoo, toothpaste, etc.
4. As a family, write a letter to the newspaper about something your community could do to help the needy.
5. What could you live without? Give it away.
6. Buy a new item of clothing to put in with the outgrown clothing you are donating to the needy.
7. Purchase a security blanket or teddy bear for a child in a homeless shelter.
8. Name five blessings in your life that are not things. Donate a generous amount for each.
9. Think of all the people who love you. Give 10 cents for each person you can think of to your family Piggy Bank for the needy.
10. Recycle toys by giving them to needy children. Be sure they are in good condition.
11. Create a craft gift for a child in the pediatric department of a local hospital.
12. Collect "cool" and unusual hats for kids with cancer who've lost their hair.

13. Create a friendship box for an underprivileged child by decorating a shoebox and filling with stocking-stuffer toys.
14. Collect warm hats, scarves, and earmuffs to donate to a homeless shelter.
15. Thin out your possessions.
16. Have soup and bread for dinner. Donate the money saved to a soup kitchen.
17. "The extra coat in your closet belongs to the poor." Go through your closets and box up for the needy those things you aren't using.
18. Set an empty place at the table as a reminder of the hungry in the neighborhood and in the world.
19. During Advent, save every penny that you get to help a struggling family pay their heating bill.
20. Take your extra blankets to the homeless shelter.
21. Are there toys that you are still using, but you don't really need, that you could give away to a shelter for abused women and children?
22. Invite all your relatives to join together to provide Christmas remembrances (food and clothes) for a family who is needy.
23. String raisins, cranberries and popcorn and decorate a tree for the birds outside a nursing-home window for the residents to enjoy.
24. Go to a soup kitchen and help clean up – after you've visited with the people.
25. Take a home cooked meal (everyone in the family can have a part in the preparation) to someone who is sick or lonely.
26. When you go shopping, buy doubles of everything. Give the second items to the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

27. Take someone to a concert or theater or museum that ordinarily would not be able to attend.
28. Make a contribution to support an organization for the handicapped.
29. Make something. Give it away.
30. Give up fancy beverages or carbonated drinks and donate the money saved to a parish or civic group that helps needy people pay water and/or electric bills.
31. Read Acts 6. Today, St. Stephen's Day or Boxing Day, many people give boxes filled with gifts to the poor. Collect good used clothing, toys and books for those in need.
32. Are you traveling to see relatives this Christmas? Think of Joseph's and Mary's journey to Bethlehem. Give 50 cents every time you eat in a restaurant during your trip. (Give to the poor.)
33. Volunteer to help: at the parish, local library, Red Cross, American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, homeless shelter, etc.
34. Read Matthew 2:13-18. Due to Herod's wrath, the Holy Family became refugees. There are 12 million refugees in the world. Write down reasons why people become refugees (war, poverty, etc.). Give 50 cents to the poor for each reason.
35. Makes sandwiches to take to a homeless shelter.
36. Makes baskets full of crayons, coloring books, puzzles, etc. to give to children in the hospital.
37. Run an errand for a sick neighbor.

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