

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 buying presents, not wear ourselves out physically, emotionally and spiritually trying to be in so many places, do so many things, and be in the “holiday spirit”.

Well, it’s coming again, and unless we make some plans right now about how to refocus on the true meaning of the season, we will travel down the same road to exhaustion and overspent budgets. So what to do?

First, **get together with your family. Do it now!** Talk over what is good about your holiday traditions and what isn’t so good. Decide what really honors God’s great gift of Jesus Christ to us, and what doesn’t. 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. Maybe no one will commit to a night out without discussion as a family. Or, we will only be out two nights a week and we’ll decide as a family which those two will be.

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

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 helping those in need. There is no lack of possibilities here. The Presbytery has some suggestions, for which we can provide materials to help in your church or family. You can give the gift of health to Guatemalans or provide scholarships for Guatemalan children. You can support Nkhoma Hospital or the Ebenezer School in Malawi.

You will have ideas about gifts for those in your own community who are in need.

2. **GIVE YOURSELF:** Might this not be the most precious and difficult gift to give to someone you love? Your presence instead of presents? Time instead of trinkets? By spending time to really think about the one we want to gift, we may find the perfect gift isn’t to be found in a store or online catalogue. Such as a coupon for:
 - Cooking and cleaning up after dinner

- A back rub
- Free baby sitting
- Write a poem or draw a picture.

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 (twelve hours a day, 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. Just two are listed below:
- Visit self-help shops operated by Ten Thousand Villages, a Christian ministry that works with cooperatives around the world. There are four in our area: Montreat; 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, tea, chocolate, or nuts via Enough for Everyone or via one of the twenty global partners (within the US and international) which are identified at www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace/partners.

Educational materials and alternative gift cards are available through the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. Contact Grace Boyer 828-438-4217.

Other helpful websites:

www.pcusa.org/justliving/seasons/christmas
www.simpleliving.org
www.pcusa.org/enough
www.pcusa.org/hunger
www.newdream.org/holiday/index.php
www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace/partners

Ideas for reclaiming Advent/Christmas
 “Whose Birthday is It Anyway”
 “Enough for Everyone” resources
 Presbyterian Hunger Program
 Ideas for simplifying Christmas
 List of global partners