

# 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](http://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](http://www.pcusa.org/justliving/seasons/christmas)  
[www.simpleliving.org](http://www.simpleliving.org)  
[www.pcusa.org/enough](http://www.pcusa.org/enough)  
[www.pcusa.org/hunger](http://www.pcusa.org/hunger)  
[www.newdream.org/holiday/index.php](http://www.newdream.org/holiday/index.php)  
[www.pcusa.org/globalmarketplace/partners](http://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

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## Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?

The day after Christmas many people vow that “next Christmas is going to be different.” But unless congregations make plans right now to help members focus on the true meaning of the season, they will probably travel down the same road to disappointment, exhaustion, and overspent budgets. Presbytery has **many** materials that can help your church and your families “Reclaim Christmas.” Contact Lisa Pressley for a sample packet (828/438-4217; lpressley@presbyterywnc.org).

What about gifts? A while back someone came up with three helpful gift-giving guidelines. Again there are materials available through Presbytery that can help you flesh out each of these.

- 1. 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?
- 2. BUY WITH CONSCIENCE:** There are some wonderful gifts that you can buy, knowing that those who produced them are being treated with dignity.
- 3. GIVE TO THOSE HE CAME TO SERVE:** Although Jesus came for us all, His life and teachings reflect a special concern for those on the margins of society.



Each year a few gifts are offered by Presbytery, gifts that offer hope and help to those in special need. The following three pages describe these gifts for 2009. Note the option with a coloring card for children to purchase.

**Churches can order a sample set and multiple order cards to display. If a church is having an Advent fair or an emphasis on “giving gifts that give twice,” we can provide multiples of the cards requested.** 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.

The sample order form below is for reproduction.

Please complete my order for the following Christmas cards -

Please send my completed order to:

**For Africa ~ Adult Options: (\$20 each)**

- Nkhoma Hospital - Malawi
- Nkhoma School Project - Malawi

Name : \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Address : \_\_\_\_\_

**For Guatemala ~ Adult Options: (\$20 each)**

- Children’s Scholarship Fund
- Health Program

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

**E-mail Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Special Instructions:** \_\_\_\_\_

**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)

**Remit order form to:**

Lisa Pressley  
PWNC  
114 Silver Creek Rd  
Morganton, NC 28655  
[lpressley@presbyterywnc.org](mailto:lpressley@presbyterywnc.org)

**Other Options: (amounts vary)**

- Provide Fifteen Blood Tests at Nkhoma Hospital (\$20)
- Support Jakarta Theological Seminary, Indonesia (\$40)
- One Week Apartment Rent for Ebenezer School Teachers, Nkhoma (\$50)
- Help a Church Participate in the Acts 16:5 Initiative (Revitalization) (\$100)
- Enable a Small Church to have a Full-time Pastor (Support for 2 Weeks) (\$200)
- Provide a Half-day Supply of Medicine for Nkhoma Hospital (\$250)

**Enclosed is a check**  
for \$ \_\_\_\_\_



# CHRISTMAS GIFT OPTIONS

Every Christmas the Presbytery of Western North Carolina offers “gifts that give twice” that both honor your family members and friends and help those with specific needs.

By supporting the mission programs of our Presbytery, you are, in fact, honoring the birth of Jesus, who came that all may have life, and have it abundantly.

The following cards and card inserts supporting the stated ministry are available for 2009:

**Cards are available for a minimum contribution of \$20.**

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## **Nkhoma Hospital ~ Malawi, Africa**

In your honor a gift has been made to Nkhoma Hospital in Malawi, Africa.

Nkhoma Hospital in Nkhoma is a large, regional hospital of the Church of Central Africa-Presbyterian. It provides services in pediatrics, maternity, general medicine, surgery, and ophthalmology. The hospital also serves as a referral center for an extensive satellite system of smaller hospitals and clinics. Although it has vast responsibilities, it has extremely limited resources. This gift will help Nkhoma Hospital in its ministry.



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## **Ebenezer Education Institute for Children ~ Malawi, Africa**

In your honor a gift has been made to the Ebenezer Education Institute for Children in Malawi, Africa.

Primary school in Malawi is of very poor quality due to lack of resources and teachers and the poor status of students as they enter crowded classrooms. It is customary for a primary classroom to have over 100 students, no desks, no books, and no supplies. The Nkhoma Hospital staff values education for their children so highly that many make long daily trips to Lilongwe or leave the hospital for jobs closer to better schools. Ebenezer Education Institute for Children was founded to offer quality education to children in the Malawi community. Work on the second classroom has begun and this gift will help bring this dream of a quality school to reality.



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## **Guatemalan Children's Scholarship Program**

In thanksgiving for you, a gift has been given to provide scholarships to the children and youth of Guatemala

Education in Guatemala is not free. School supplies and uniforms must be purchased and registration fees paid before students can enter school. If there is not a school within walking distance, students must also pay to ride to and from school. Many churches in partner presbyteries in Guatemala want to provide scholarships for children and youth to attend school. This gift will support them in their efforts.



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## **Guatemala Partnership Health Program**

In your honor a gift has been made to the Guatemala health program.

In a country where health care is almost non-existent for those who are poor, the Presbyteries of Western North Carolina, Sur Occidente and Suchitepequez have been operating a health program for many years. Guatemalan health promoters have been trained in basic health education and simple clinical care. More recently the project has undertaken community health projects such as composting latrines, stoves and ovens that create less smoke and use less fuel, family vegetable and medicinal herb gardens. This gift will help support leadership training and programs that local communities develop to address their specific health needs.



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Each card has the following greeting inside:  
May the Joy of Christ fill your heart during this Holy Season  
Christmas Blessings.

# CHRISTMAS GIFT OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN TO GIVE

Helping children celebrate Christmas as Jesus' birthday isn't an easy task since our culture encourages them to "need or want" many things. But reclaiming the Christmas season can be meaningful and enjoyable for children, parents, family and friends alike.

There are many helps available from the Presbytery office. The most generally helpful is entitled "Christmas and Children." The story "Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?" helps children deal with the issue in a whimsical but very easily understood way.

Giving children options about how they can "give birthday presents to Jesus" is one way to help them gain experience in making choices that run counter to popular culture. We have designed a Christmas card that they can customize by coloring and choosing from among four gift possibilities. (See below.) Order as many cards and labels as you think you might use in your congregation. Along with the order we will send ideas and materials to help you develop a program, special event, or emphasis around "Reclaiming Christmas." **Note that there are several alternative gifts available for youth and adults as well.**

FRONT:

**It's Jesus' Birthday!**



BACK:

**So I bought Him  
a present for you.**

*(Insert purchased label here.)*

**Merry Christmas!**

*(Signature)*

**SUGGESTED  
PRICE**

**LABEL OPTIONS**



I helped buy healthy food for children in Guatemala.

**\$2.00**



I bought a Mosquito net to protect the children of Malawi, Africa from malaria.

**\$2.00**



I bought plumpy nuts (a highly nutritious food) for children in Malawi, Africa.

**\$2.00**



I bought school supplies for children in Guatemala.

**\$2.00**