

# Growing in FAITH

Discovering hope and joy in the Catholic faith.

Special Advent Issue 2008

## Advent: Peace in a time of frenzy

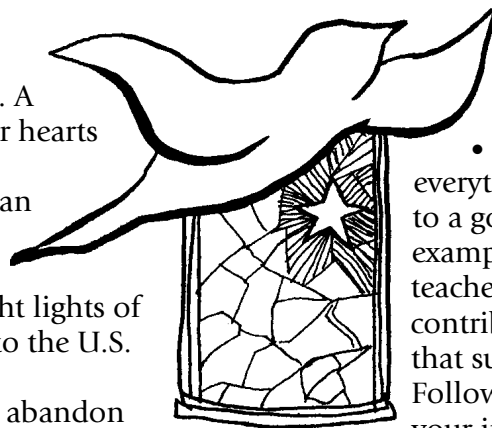
**A**dvent is a peaceful and reflective time. A time to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of our Savior. So, how can a sensible Catholic spiritually prepare for the coming of Jesus amidst the frenzy and bright lights of the holiday season? According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: "Catholicism does not call us to abandon the world, but to help shape it. This does not mean leaving worldly tasks and responsibilities, but transforming them."

Try these tips for "transforming" worldly holiday tasks into acts of prayer, penance, and almsgiving:

### Shopping & gift-giving

- Giving handmade gifts is a way to show our love and honor the artisans who make them at the same time. Good sources are craft fairs in your community that feature goods by local artists where you can find everything from wooden toys to hand-knitted scarves and socks.
- "Fair-Trade" import stores offer one-of-a-kind gifts from around the world.

(See [www.fairtradefederation.org](http://www.fairtradefederation.org).) Plus, when you do your shopping away from the mall and the large retailers, your gift-giving dollars



support good causes and the artisans who made the things you choose.

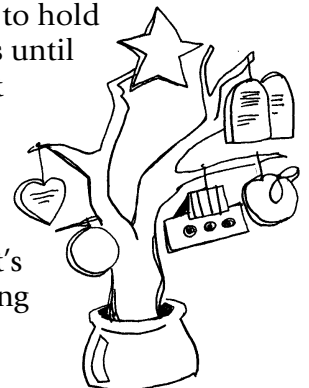
- If somebody on your list 'has everything', think about making a donation to a good cause in their name. For example, a good idea for a teacher's gift would be a contribution to a program that supports literacy. Follow with a card stating your intention.

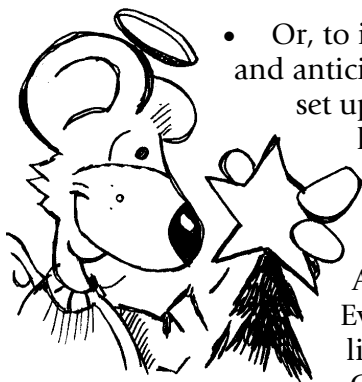


- Give spiritual bouquets by offering a rosary (or more) for people on your gift list. Make cards that detail your thoughtful gift. If you prayed for a particular intention, be sure to include that in your card.
- Include in your Christmas cards a note about all the blessings you have received this year. Not only will your friends and family enjoy reading about your good news, your card will be a testament to God's loving care.

### Tree trimming and decorating

- The ideal practice would be to hold off decorating for Christmas until Christmas Eve, but that isn't always practical. Instead, decorate your home and your tree when you have time, but don't light the tree till Christmas Eve. That's one way to signify the coming of the "light of the world."





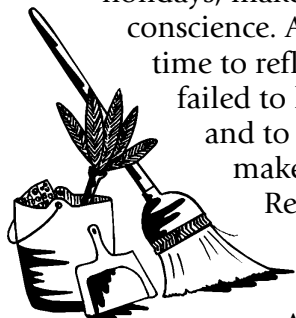
- Or, to increase the excitement and anticipation of Christmas, set up your tree, put on the lights, but don't decorate it. Instead, add one ornament a day throughout Advent. On Christmas Eve, add the rest and light the tree on Christmas morning.

Step back and be delighted with your handiwork.

- Set up your nativity scene but leave out the Holy Family. Put Joseph, Mary and Jesus in their places on Christmas Eve and add the Baby the next morning.

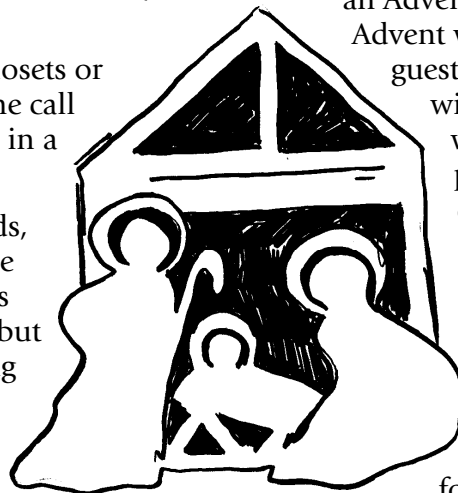
### Housekeeping

- While you clean house in preparation for the holidays, make an examination of conscience. Advent is exactly the right time to reflect on the ways that we have failed to honor God or each other and to decide to start fresh. First make a heartfelt confession.



Reconciliation will let you greet Christmas with a heart full of peace and joy.

- As you spruce things up around the house, look for ways to repair relationships. Remember, we are called to love and kindness — and not just to our favorite people. *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:35).
- While you are cleaning out closets or sorting laundry, make a phone call to someone you haven't seen in a while.
- When you are running errands, take the time to visit someone who is alone. Such small acts of love take only a moment, but the warm memory lasts a long time.
- After going through your closets and cleaning out the



clutter in your home, pick a bad habit you would like to kick and resolve to do it during Advent. Avoid overeating, quit smoking, stop gossiping, resolve to always tell the truth, or promise to use gentle, non-violent language. Offer your sacrifice as a birthday gift to the Savior at Christmas.

### Parties

- Transform a holiday get-together into an occasion for charity and helping others. Suggest each guest bring a child's toy to the party, and take responsibility for getting them to "Toys for Tots" or another charity that helps needy families have a joyful Christmas.



Bonus: for many grown-ups without children, the chance to choose something they know will light up a kid's life is fun.

- Put out a large punch bowl or salad bowl and ask for donations for your favorite charity. People in a festive mood will feel generous toward those without such opportunities.
- Instead of automatically buying a new outfit for a holiday party, spruce up something you already have and put the money you saved in the poor box at church.
- Pick one Sunday and host an Advent party. Light an Advent wreath with your guests and play music with lyrics about waiting, patience, hope, or other themes of Advent.



Don't forget to make time during Advent for quiet prayer and reflection. The graces you receive from the time you spend with God will be your gift for Christmas.