



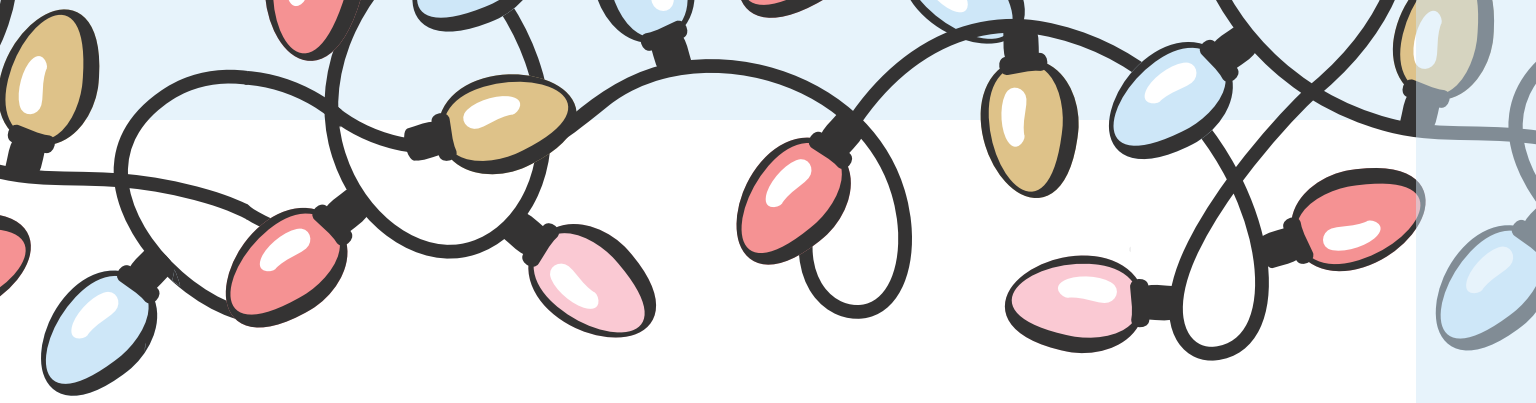
Reframing the Holidays

by Laurie Ziliak

Christmas is just around the corner. This one is bound to be different as families continue to grapple with the impacts of the corona virus crisis. Unemployment remains high, many are facing their first holiday without loved ones, and the overall economic reality continues to have major impacts. Christmas will likely be very different for people around the world.

The cultural celebration of Christmas is largely directed toward children. They are the recipients of gifts, constantly being reminded of the impending arrival of Santa Claus (and how their behavior impacts their presence on the naughty or nice list). Our liturgical life also offers a special nod to children at Christmas. Many liturgies have special additions just for children, such as a Christmas story or a role-play of the Gospel. In some cases, candy canes are even distributed. Children are on the receiving end of Christmas.

Children likely are aware of the changes and challenges faced by their families this year. **Help them reframe Christmas by inviting them to actively create Christmas joy or “bring” Christmas to others this year.** Invite them to be givers and to embrace the spirit of Christmas generosity.

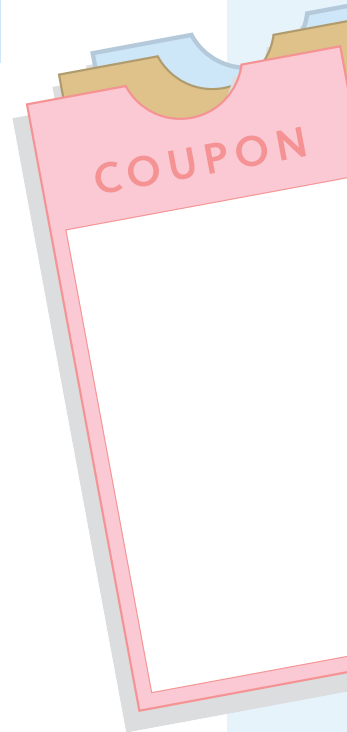


Focus On Giving to Others

Remind children that Christmas is often seen as the season of giving. This is because of the wonderful gift that was given to us at this time—Jesus! Invite the children to explore how they can spread Christmas joy through giving gifts.

Coupon books: Invite children to name five things they can do around the house to help out their families. Have them use those five things to create coupon books for their families and give them as gifts before Christmas. Or invite children to help out, mark the date on the coupon book, and give the “completed” book as a gift.

Gifts of kindness: Invite children to think of a person whom they could spread Christmas joy to and encourage them to send this person a daily note, text, email, or video call.





Pray: Many people are in need of prayer. Ask each child to identify one person or family to pray for each day. Introduce a Christmas prayer project and facilitate daily prayer time for the children to pray for these people, either silently, or by first names only. Encourage the children to continue the daily prayer practice throughout Advent and Christmas. Create paper ornaments with the first names of the people the children will be praying for as reminders.

Reach out: Many in care facilities have faced increased isolation since March. Take on a project to reach out to residents in a local facility. Connect with a local facility to identify names of those most in need of communication, and assign children to one or two specific people in the facility by name (facilitating personal relationships). Invite the children to create cards weekly for their resident(s). Many care facilities have their own closed-circuit TV system. If your local facility has this capability, create a video of your group singing or verbally sending good wishes for the care facility and naming their assigned resident(s) by name.

Celebrate: Many loved ones will be unable to gather this year for the holidays. Invite the children to create a physical representation of those who will not be able to gather by including pictures and prayers for the family. Alternatively, invite the children to create a representation of their family to send to those who will not be able to gather.





Facilitate Creativity

Help the children reorient their sense of gifts away from material possessions by inviting them to reimagine what they might include on their Christmas wish list.

Time: For many families, the gift of unscheduled time can be more significant than material gifts. Invite the children to think about ways their family can spend time together (watching a specific movie together, reading a book aloud, playing a board game, and so forth), and ask for that as a gift.

Baking project: Baking is part of many families' Christmas rituals. Invite the children to think about baking rituals in their family and to ask if they can help this year or learn to make a special family recipe. Encourage them to include a family baking project on their wish list.

Favorite meal: Encourage the children to think about their favorite meal or homemade treat and to replace something material on their list with their favorite meal.

Something to share: Encourage the children to think about a gift they could share with others (maybe a game they can play with a younger sibling, or art materials to allow them to make something for a family member).

To pretend that this Christmas will be a Christmas like others is to do a disservice to children and ourselves. Help the children actively be involved in reframing Christmas, inviting them to be givers this year.

