Advent Intergenerational Learning Program
Focus: Preparing for the Messiah

1. Introduction to Intergenerational Learning

Intergenerational learning models are designed for a 2–3 hour timeframe with time for a meal included. The design format for an intergenerational learning model includes six parts.

Registration and Hospitality
Welcome people and ask them to sign-in for the program and make or receive name tags. Distribute Home Kits including the handouts for the session. Invite people to share a meal. (Depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal.)

Part 1. Gathering
Provide an overview of the program and theme. Conduct a community building activity and a forming groups activity (if necessary). Lead the group in prayer and song on the theme of the program.

Part 2. All-Ages Opening Experience
Intergenerational religious education begins with a multigenerational experience of the theme that all the generations share together. In-common experiences of generations are usually less verbal and more observatory than in the other three elements. In-common experiences equalize the ages, so that listening to music or singing, making an art project, watching a video, hearing a story, participating in a ritual, praying together, and so on, are things that different-aged people do at the same time and place in a similar manner. Learning is at a level where all may do it together.

Part 3. In-depth Learning Experience
Through structured learning activities and discussion all generations explore the meaning of the event and develop the ability to participate meaningfully in the event. In-depth learning experiences can be designed in one of three formats:

- The Learning Activity Center Format provides structured learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area. Learning activity centers are usually facilitated by a leader with background reading, instructions for the activity, and materials for engaging in the activity. Tables and chairs (or floor space) are essential so that individuals and families can learn, create, and discuss.

- The Parallel Learning Format provides age-appropriate learning for groups at the same time. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic—utilizing specific learning activities that are designed for their life cycle stage, e.g., families with children, adolescents, young adult, adults, et al. Parallel learning sessions can be designed in a variety of ways, e.g., learning activity centers for the families-
children, group integrated lesson plans for adolescents, faith sharing groups or guest speaker for adults.

- The Learning Group Format provides a series of facilitated learning activities for the entire group using intergenerational groupings or family and age groups. The entire group is guided through an integrated learning program.

**Part 4. Whole Group Sharing Experience**

All participants re-gather and each group briefly shares what they have learned and/or created in their in-depth experience. Whole group sharing provides an opportunity for each generation to teach the others. Groups can share the project or activity they created, offering a verbal summary or symbol of their learning, a dramatic presentation, etc. Whole group sharing can also be conducted in small groups—intergenerational, family or kindred age groups—rather than using presentations to the entire group.

**Part 5. Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application**

To conclude the program participants have the opportunity to reflect on what they learned and to prepare for applying their learning to their daily lives. The Home Kit provides individuals and families with a variety of practical tools for bringing the event home. After an explanation of how to use the Home Kit, individuals and families have time to create an at-home action plan for using the Home Kit. Participants can be organized into family groupings, intergenerational groupings, and/or kindred groups of age groups for reflection and application.

**Part 6. Closing Prayer Service**

Everyone comes together to close the session with a prayer of thanksgiving inspired by the music and Lectionary readings of the season.

2. Advent Program Outline (2–3 hour design)

*Theme: Preparing for the Messiah*

**Registration and Hospitality**

- Sign-in for the program; make or receive name tags.
- Distribute Home Kits including the handouts for the session.
- Invite people to share a meal. (Depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal.)

**Meal (20-30 minutes)**

**Part 1. Gathering (10-15 minutes)**

- Environment: Set up a prayer table or decorate the large group meeting space with symbols of Advent: Advent Wreath, Jesse Tree, purple tablecloths or banner, candles, Lectionary, etc.

- Welcome the participants and provide an overview of the program and schedule.
- Conduct a community building activity and a forming groups activity (if necessary). -
Lead the participants in an opening prayer service on the theme: “Preparing for the Messiah.”

- Suggested Advent Lectionary readings on images of the Messiah for prayer:
  - Old Testament: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10 (Third Sunday of Advent-A) or Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-B),
  - Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-A)

- Use the following church resources for creating an opening prayer service:
  - Prayers from the Sacramentary for the Sundays of Advent
  - Music that will be used during the Advent season.

- Here are additional prayer resources for Advent prayer services. The children or adolescent prayer services can easily be adapted for an intergenerational audience. (* These two resources are highly recommended because they contain fully designed prayer services for all ages.)

**Part 2. All Ages Opening Experience (15-20 minutes)**

The All Ages Opening Experience introduces the participants to the theme of the program. There are a variety of ways to conduct the opening experience. For a presentation to the large group you can use drama, media, storytelling, or another interactive approach that works well with a large group. Here are three suggestions:
**Suggestion 1. Media Presentation:** Create a video or PowerPoint presentation (text and images) with a variety of images of the Messiah with accompanying Scripture passages from the Advent Lectionary Cycle A, as well as images of the Messiah from the Gospels. You can find images of Jesus in artwork by going online to view and download pictures from the Vatican museum www.christusrex.org/www1/vaticano/0-Musei.html. There are other online art galleries of religious art that you can find by using your search engine (e.g., www.google.com).

You can read the Scripture passages aloud and/or include them in the media presentation. The presentation should answer the question: “The Messiah will come to…” Accompany the presentation with instrumental music.

In addition to Gospel stories from the life of Jesus, here are three readings from the Advent Lectionary that contain images of the Messiah:

- Old Testament: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10 (Third Sunday of Advent-A)
- Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-A)

**Suggestion 2. Music:** Use hymns and songs to illustrate images of the Messiah. Check your parish hymnal, children’s music (CDs), and liturgical music (CDs) and select songs that reflect different images of the Messiah. Introduce the song, sing it together, and then connect the song to a Scripture passage from Advent or the life of Jesus in the Gospels.

**Suggestion 3. Dramatization:** You can dramatize Matthew 11:2-11 or several Gospel passages that illustrate images of the Messiah. Here are several resources with dramas and role plays.

Part 3. In-Depth Learning: Parallel Learning (75–90 minutes)

1. Families with Children: Learning Activity Center Format or Learning Group Format
   You can organize the learning activities in two ways. For activity centers: In the meeting space organize activity centers for 2 or 3 of the activity plans. Use tables and chairs (or floor space) for children and families to learn, work, discuss. At each center a team of facilitators/catechists guide the families through the activity plan. Make sure each center has all of the materials necessary for conducting the activity. Keep the activity centers far enough apart so that people can focus on their activity.

   For the learning group format: organize the activities at table groups for two or more families. Make sure each table has the supplies, instructions, and learning materials necessary to do the activities. A facilitator guides the families through each activity. Catechists move from table to table assisting families.

   Three fully designed activities are included for your use. Review each activity plan, determine your timeframe and select the activities you will use. If you only select two activity plans, consider Activity #1: Advent Wreaths and one of the other two activities.

   Activity #1: Advent Wreaths
   Activity #2: Jesse Tree
   Activity #3: Advent Calendar

2. Adolescent Learning Activities
   Three fully designed activities are included for your use. Depending on your timeframe, select one or two of the following activity plans to include in the adolescent session:

   Activity #1: Advent Wreaths
   Activity #2: Advent Calendar
   Activity #3: Jesse Tree (Adapt the children’s activity plan for use with adolescents.)

3. Young Adult and Adult Learning Activities
   Four different adult learning programs are suggested below. You may want to develop other adult program offerings. Depending on the number of adult participants and your available meeting rooms, you may want to conduct more than one learning activity.

   Option 1. Images of the Messiah Learning Program (included)

   Option 2. Video and Discussion
   Use a video presentation, The Church Celebrates: Advent and Christmas (Catholic Update Videos, St. Anthony Messenger Press) as the centerpiece of learning activity. The video includes four segments: a story, witness (reflections from Catholics), teaching/presentation, and music video reflection. It is a good introduction to the Advent and Christmas seasons. The study guide has reflection questions and ways to use the video with groups.
Note: You can begin any of the other three options with this video or weave it into the learning activity. This will provide a good context for any of the activities.

Option 3: Word and Music in the Advent-Christmas Seasons
Organize a presentation by a parish staff person or guest speaker and the parish music director or other musician. This program is best done in church where the musician has access to an organ or piano. Guide participants through the Advent-Christmas seasons by using the following process, repeating it for each Sunday of Advent and Christmas day:

1. Begin with a reading from the Lectionary (Old Testament or Gospel reading) that focuses on preparing for the Messiah.
2. Share a brief reflection on the reading. Use a Lectionary commentary.
3. Invite the participants in small groups to share a reflection on the reading using a question such as: What does the reading say to us about the Messiah and what he will come to do? What are the implications of the images of the Messiah found in this reading for our lives as Catholics?
4. Conclude by singing an Advent hymn on the theme of the reading. Use hymns that will be sung during the Advent-Christmas season.

Option 4: Guest Speaker
Invite a guest speaker (parish staff or someone from outside the parish) to give a presentation on “Preparing for the Messiah” in the Advent season. Be sure the presentation connects to the theme and to the Advent Lectionary.

Part 4. Whole Group Sharing Experience (15 minutes)

- Determine what each group will bring back to the large group or to their small group to share as a result of their learning.
- Determine how each group will share their reports or projects so that they “teach” the other groups about the event and theme.

Here are examples of presentations that the different learning groups can share with the larger group:

1. Families with Children: Several families can present their Jesse Tree or Advent Calendar.
2. Adolescents: Several adolescents can share key Scripture passages incorporated in the Jesse Tree or ideas from their Advent Calendars.
3. Adults: Adults can share images of the Messiah, an important Scripture reading from the Advent Lectionary, and/or sing an Advent hymn.

Part 5. Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application (10 minutes)

- Guide individuals and families in sharing what they learned through the program. They can be organized in family clusters, individual family units, and/or kindred groups (young adults, adults, older adults).
- Review the Home Kit for the event containing prayers, rituals, service projects, family enrichment, and learning activities.
- Guide everyone in developing an individual or family action plan for living at home using the Home Kit, and planning for participation in the Advent season.
Part 6. Closing Prayer Service (5-10 minutes)

To prepare the closing prayer service, use the suggested resources from the opening prayer service. If people made Advent wreaths or Advent calendars, you might want to close with one of the following prayer services.

Advent Wreath Lighting Prayer

Ask everyone to stand...
Leader: All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
(One person lights the first candle for Advent.)
Leader: Our hope is in Christ, the Light of the World.
All: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Leader: Make ready the way of the Lord; clear a straight path.
All: Lord, you are the Way, the Truth and the Life. Help us prepare for your coming by following your example of prayer, caring, and service to others.
Leader: We ask this in the name of Jesus, God’s Son and our Savior.
All: Amen.
Conclude with a closing song.

Advent Calendar Prayer Service

Gather the participants with their calendars for the closing blessing prayer.

Opening Prayer
Let us pray for God’s blessing.
Loving God, You give us the gift of time, and promise to be with us always.
You have given us this season of Advent that we might prepare to receive more fully the gift of Jesus who is our Emmanuel – God among us.
Help us to open our hearts and lives.
Bless us this day that we might be filled with your patient love and care.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
All Amen.

Reading  Mark 13: 33-37

Sharing
Invite the participants to share aloud one idea from their calendar of something they will do this Advent. After each idea is shared, invite the group to respond together: “Emmanuel, be with us.” After everyone has had a chance to share, ask participants to hold their calendars in their left hand and hold out their right hand in a gesture of blessing over the calendars of the group.

Closing Blessing
Loving God,
We ask your blessing on these Advent Calendars.
May they remind us of our call to follow Jesus and may they help us to prepare our hearts and lives for the celebration of Christmas.
We ask this through Jesus, our Guide and Friend.
All Amen.
Activity Plan

1. Gather all the supplies you will need for the Advent Calendar activity.
   • Copies of the handouts: *Advent Calendar Ideas* and *My Advent Calendar*
   • Bible (children’s Bible)
   • Pens / pencils for participants
   • Easel and newsprint for presentations, masking tape, markers
   • Christmas music and cassette or CD player
   • Supplies to make Calendar covers (Depends upon option selected. See Calendar-Making Options.)

2. Making an Advent Calendar is a great way to help people of all ages to chart their path of preparation for celebrating Christ’s coming at Christmas. Participants are reminded of the spirit of the Advent season—a time of waiting and making room for the Christ child to be born among us. Each participant will leave this session with a personalized Advent calendar containing reminders of things to do to prepare for Christmas.

3. To simplify the activity and save time, you will want to prepare for the calendar making in advance. Using the *Calendar Options*, select the best option for you. If you select the construction paper calendars, be sure to arrange for volunteers to help prepare this option in advance.

4. Organize the participants by individual families or family clusters for the reflection questions. Read each statement one at a time, allowing enough time for members of the groups to share a response with each other. Select as many questions as time allows. Keep the discussion moving from question to question.

**Questions Set #1: Thinking Back on Christmas**
- “Christmas is . . .” or “What is Christmas?”
- “The word or phrase that best describes Christmas preparation for me is . . .” For younger children: “How do you get ready for Christmas?”
- “What I like most about waiting for Christmas is . . .” or “What do you like about waiting for Christmas?”
- “What I like least about waiting for Christmas is . . .” or “What don’t you like about waiting for Christmas?”
- “If there were no presents, what would be the best part about Christmas?”

**Questions Set #2: An Alternative Set of Questions**
Think back on Christmases past and how you prepared individually and as a family for the holiday celebration. What events and experiences, thoughts and feelings come immediately to mind? Use the following sentences to describe what preparing for Christmas is like for you.
The word or phrase that best describes Christmas preparation and celebration for me is...

Getting ready for Christmas brings out the best in me and in others because...

Getting ready for Christmas brings out the worst in me and in others because...

If every day were Christmas...

5. Introduce the calendar activity by explaining the following:
   - Advent, which means “coming,” is a time when we remember that the world waited for Jesus who was the perfect and complete gift of God’s love.
   - Jesus is always with us, but we take this particular time to prepare and wait to celebrate Jesus’ birth at Christmas.
   - In a special way, we celebrate the hope that Jesus brings, and our call to continually grow in our love and faith in God. This growth is called conversion.
   - Jesus is also called Emmanuel, which means God with us. At Advent we take time to recall and celebrate that Jesus, as God, became human like us to show us the way to live and love.
   - Advent is also a time to remember God’s call to love and share. We can prepare for Christmas by praying, by being generous, by being kind, and by serving others.
   - To celebrate Advent, we can choose to do things that we hope will help us prepare for Christmas. We can also choose to not do things as a way of making more room for prayer and sharing.
   - One of the traditions of celebrating Advent is to use an Advent Calendar to count off the days until Christmas, and help us focus on our preparation for this holiday as a “holy” day.
   - Our waiting during Advent is “hopeful” waiting, which means we are hoping and believing in something good in the future. We want to be sure that we do not waste our time waiting during Advent. We want to use our time well in preparing to celebrate Christmas, and the gift of Jesus as the Messiah. So what might we do during this time of Advent? As Christians, how are we called to prepare for Christmas?
   - We will each make an Advent Calendar that will help us to focus on preparing for Christ’s presence at a time when all of the stores and commercials are trying to get us to focus on Christmas as a time of material gifts and money!

6. Guide the children and/or adolescents in making a personal Advent calendar.

   For younger children:
   Guide them in making a weekly calendar with several ideas for each week.
   - Using the Advent Calendar Ideas, select a variety of possible things that the children can do. Write these ideas on poster board or newsprint or on a transparency. Ask the children to help you find ways that they can prepare for Jesus’ coming.
   - In each of the four boxes on the handout, My Advent Calendar, ask the children to write down at least one thing they will do that week to prepare for Jesus’ coming. Help them to answer the question, This week I will…
   - Give them Christmas stickers so that they can put a sticker next to each idea that they do on their Advent calendar.

   For older children:
   Guide them in making a 25 day Advent calendar.
   - Distribute the Advent Calendar Ideas and My Advent Calendar.
- Ask the participants to read the variety of ideas on the handout, *Advent Calendar Ideas* and your own ideas. Invite the participants to brainstorm other ways that they can prepare for Jesus’ coming.

- Place each idea chosen into a box on the handout, *My Advent Calendar*. (Boxes 24 and 25 are already provided on the calendar.)

- Explain how to complete the Calendar based on the option you have selected from *Calendar Options*.

While participants are making calendars play some Christmas music in the background.

7. Suggest that participants take their calendar home and post it on their bedroom door or mirror so they can view it each day in a private way, or on the refrigerator if they want some help from family members to live their Advent ideas.
Advent Calendar Ideas

Prepare by reading the Scriptures.

4 Read about the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, in the Sunday Lectionary readings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week One of Advent</th>
<th>Cycle A</th>
<th>Cycle B</th>
<th>Cycle C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isaiah 2:1-5</td>
<td>Isaiah 63:16-17,19; &amp; 64:2-7</td>
<td>Jeremiah 33:14-16</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Isaiah 11:1-10</td>
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<td>Baruch 5:1-9</td>
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<td>Isaiah 35:1-6, 10</td>
<td>Isaiah 61:1,2, 10-11</td>
<td>Zephaniah 3:14-18</td>
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<th>Week Four of Advent</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Isaiah 7:10-14</td>
<td>2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16</td>
<td>Micah 5:1-4</td>
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4 Read about the people of faith in Jesus’ family tree.

Adam & Eve: Genesis 3:1-24  
Noah: Genesis 6:11 – 9:17  
Abraham and Sarah: Genesis 12:1-7, 15:1-6  
Isaac: Genesis 22:1-19  
Rebecca: Genesis 25:19-34; and 27  
Jacob: Genesis 28:10-22; 32:25-31  
Rachel and Leah: Genesis 29:15-30  
Joseph: Genesis 37:3-4, 17-36; 50:15-21 or Genesis 37:1 – 45:28  
Rahab: Joshua 2:1-21  
Joshua: Joshua 6:1-20  
Deborah: Judges 4:1-16  
Gideon: Judges 7:1-8, 15-20  
Samson: Judges 13:1-5; 15:14-17  
Ruth: Ruth chapters 1 – 4  
Hannah: Samuel 1:1-20, 24-28; 2:18-20  
David: 1 Samuel 16:1-16  
Solomon: 1 Kings 3:4-15  
Elijah: 1 Kings 19:3-13; 2 Kings 2:1-5, 9-13  
Jonah: Jonah 1:1-17; 2:10; 3:1-3  
Isaiah: Isaiah 9:1-6 and 11:1-9  
Ezekiel: Ezekiel 37:1-14 and 24-28  
Malachi: Malachi 4:1-6  
Elizabeth: Luke 1:5-25  
John the Baptist: Luke 1:57-80  
Joseph: Matthew 1:18-25  

4 Read the Gospel of Luke 1:39-52. Spend time thinking today: What has God done for me that I am especially thankful for?

4 Read Mary’s Song of Praise (The Magnificat) in Luke 1:44-57. Pray that Mary will give you the courage to approach God with humility and openness to God’s will and spirit in your life during this Advent season.

Prepare by participating in church activities.

4. Make Advent a time of reconciliation by participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
4. Join the community in Christmas caroling.
4. Find time to participate in church-sponsored service projects during Advent.
4. Volunteer time to help with children’s Christmas programs, such as a Christmas pageant.

Prepare by doing things with your family.

4. Create a Christmas decoration for a room or table in your house that is a reminder of what Christmas is really about.
4. Make an ornament for your family Christmas tree.
4. Decorate the Christmas tree.
4. Create Christmas gifts of your own creating (which do not cost a lot of money): food (cookies, bread), artwork, pottery, sewing, candles, carvings, needlepoint, etc.
4. Give the gift of time—service to others (hours helping others); helping a family member, relative or friend do their Christmas shopping or wrapping; reading stories to children, etc.
4. Read a book about Christmas traditions around the world. Add an idea you like to your family Christmas celebration.
4. Read stories of Christmas. For example, read about St. Nicholas and think of two ways you could be like St. Nick during Advent.
4. Watch Christmas videos with your family, such as A Christmas Carol or It’s a Wonderful Life.
4. Play a game with your family, instead of watching television tonight.
4. Spend time with a younger brother, sister or neighbor, reading, playing a game, or making a Christmas ornament.
4. Give up television for today and spend the time thinking about the kind of person that Jesus wants you to be.
4. Write a note to another family member telling them what you appreciate about them.
4. Ask a parent to share a story about Christmas when they were growing up.
4. Write a letter to a grandparent, an aunt or an uncle—share with them a wish you have for their new year.

Prepare by praying for people.

4. Pray for someone in the newspaper who is in need.
4. Write down a list of three people you want to pray for. Keep the list with you and pray for each person today.
4. Find a special quiet place and pray for those in need in your family, your neighborhood and our world.
4. Lead the meal prayer tonight—share something you are thankful for and ask others to do the same.
4. Take ten minutes in a quiet place or on a walk and talk to God about something that is bothering you—ask God for help.
4. Write down a list of things you are thankful for. Spend time saying “Thank You” to God in prayer.
4 Give the gift of prayer—write a special prayer for people, develop a prayer list of people you will pray for each day.
4 Locate Israel and Bethlehem on a globe or world map. Pray for peace in the land and continent of Jesus’ birth.
4 Take time today to sit and pray. Think about what you are thankful for and what your hopes are for the coming year.

Prepare by serving and caring for others.

4 Shovel someone’s walk or rake up leaves on someone’s yard without being paid.
4 With your allowance or personal money, purchase a gift for a child—donate it to your parish or school gift drive.
4 Visit a friend or relative in a nursing home, or write a Christmas greeting letter to a resident at a nearby retirement home.
4 Collect and drop-off non-perishable food items at a local food pantry.
4 Create a card for a child in the hospital, or someone in your parish who is homebound or sick.
4 Ask a parent or older sibling how you can be of help to them today.
4 Clean a part of the house without being asked or paid, just to surprise your parent.
4 Help make dinner, and create a special atmosphere in which to share the meal as a family.
4 Collect or save money to donate to a worthy organization, working to alleviate poverty, such as the local Salvation Army’s Adopt-a-Family Program during the holiday season or Habitat for Humanity (912-924-6935) or the Heifer Project International (800-422-0755). Consider giving a gift that supports the organization through the coming year.
4 Donate from your “wealth”: look through your clothes for things in good shape that you will never wear again. Bundle them for delivery to a church-run thrift shop or shelter.
4 Buy a gift you would personally like to have. Wrap it for distribution to someone your age at a local family shelter.
4 As you watch or read today’s news reports, think about where Jesus is being born in poverty today and what you can do to help.
4 Look for someone who is left out or alone at school today and spend time with them during recess or lunch break.
4 Forgive a friend who hurt you, and let them know they are forgiven.
4 Be especially nice to someone who bothers you today.
4 Give gifts that support the poor: consider SERRV, self-help crafts. All of the profits go directly to the poor who make the crafts (800-451-4407). Also consider candles made by Sheep Ranch Catholic Worker Farm (Box 53, Sheep Ranch, CA 95250, 209-728-2193). Send for a catalog. All monies go toward their ministry to people with AIDS and people with developmental disabilities.
# My Advent Calendar

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<td>25 <strong>Christmas Day!</strong>&lt;br&gt;Spend the day with loved ones celebrating God’s gift of Jesus. Take some time to thank God for this special day.</td>
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My Advent Calendar

Advent Week 1

Advent Week 2

Advent Week 3

Advent Week 4

24 Christmas Eve

25 Christmas Day!
Spend the day with loved ones celebrating God’s gift of Jesus. Take some time to thank God for this special day.
Calendar-Making Options

Preparing in advance for the calendar-making will help this activity run smoothly and meaningfully for the participants and the leaders. Choose one of the following options for creating the Advent Calendars.

Option 1: Construction Paper Windows
This option requires the most advance preparation.

Objective
Create a construction paper Calendar with 25 “windows”. Personal Advent preparation ideas will be placed in these windows.

Supplies Needed
- Construction paper: 12 x 18 inches
  (Use Advent colors of dark blue, purple and pink.)
- Exacto knife or scissors
- Glue

Decoration Supplies (for use during the activity)
- Markers
- Magazines
- Used Christmas cards
- Stickers
- Glue
- Glitter

Instructions for Creating the Calendar
1. You will use two sheets of 12 x 18 construction paper per calendar, one for a cover and one for a back.
2. Using scissors or an exacto knife, cut 25 “Windows” spaced throughout the cover. The windows can be approximately 1” high and 2” wide. The size of the window opening should match the size of the blank squares on the Handout: My Advent Calendar. Cut the window on three sides, creating a flap at the top and a window that opens at the bottom.
3. Number the windows 1 to 25.
4. Place glue on the outside edges of the back sheet of construction paper and adhere the front “window” cover to the back sheet.

Instructions for Participants during the Calendar Activity
1. Select a construction paper Calendar.
2. Cut your calendar ideas into squares 1-25.
3. Glue the calendar idea squares inside the corresponding “window.”
4. Decorate your calendar using the available supplies; be careful not to cover or glue down the window flaps.
Option 2: Poster with Post-Its
This option requires little preparation.

Objective
Create a poster with 25 post-it notes covering the personal Advent ideas.

Materials Needed
- Poster boards: approximately 24” x 36” (one for each participant)
- Post-it notes: 2 ½” square, multicolored—blue, purple and pink if possible (25 notes per participant)

Decoration Supplies (for use during activity)
- Markers
- Magazines
- Used Christmas cards
- Stickers
- Glue
- Glitter

Instructions for Participants during Calendar Activity
1. Select a poster and a pad of post-it notes (you will need 25 notes).
2. Cut your calendar ideas into squares 1-25.
3. Glue the calendar notes onto the poster leaving 2” as a border between each Advent preparation idea.
4. Cover each preparation idea with a post-it note.
5. Number the outside of the post-it note to match the corresponding number for the idea.
6. Decorate the notes and the poster—be sure not to cover or glue down the post-it notes.

Option 3: Calendar with Stickers
This option requires little advance preparation.

Objective
Create a calendar that uses Christmas stickers to count off the days during Advent. Provide each participant with an envelope containing Christmas stickers to use throughout the Advent season. At the end of each day during Advent, participants will place a sticker over the corresponding idea which they have done for that day. The calendar becomes filled with holiday stickers as Christmas approaches.

Supplies Needed
- Packets of Christmas stickers (each participant will need 25 stickers)
- Dark blue, purple and pink construction paper, 12” x 18” (one sheet for each participant)

Decoration Supplies (for use during activity)
- Markers
- Magazines
- Used Christmas cards
• Stickers
• Glue
• Glitter

Instructions for Participants during Calendar Activity
1. Select a piece of colored construction paper.
2. Cut your calendar ideas into squares 1-25.
3. Glue the calendar idea squares onto the construction paper, allowing space between each idea.
4. Decorate your calendar using the available supplies; be careful not to cover up the idea squares.
5. Select a set of Christmas stickers, and staple the envelope to the calendar keeping the flap open to allow access to the stickers.

To use the Calendar and Count-off Days
At the end of each day, place a Christmas sticker over the Advent preparation idea that you have completed which corresponds to that day.
Activity Plan

1. Gather all the supplies you will need for the Advent Calendar activity.
   - A Bible (children’s Bible)
   - Advent wreath-making supplies: (The supplies listed will be needed for each wreath to be made.)
     - A circular base to which you can attached evergreen branches. The base can be made from a variety of materials such as: vine wreath, wood, wire mesh, Styrofoam, modeling clay, compressed straw, a florists’ sponge wreath form, or a straightened coat hanger shaped into a circle. Check a local craft store or craft catalog for options.
     - Evergreen branches sprayed with water to reduce drying. If you are able to collect branches in your area, involve the participants in cutting and trimming them. Provide old scissors or hand shears for cutting. If boughs are not readily available in your area, ask parishioners to donate trimmings from their Christmas trees the Sunday prior to the program. Provide several buckets of water near the church entrance for collection of the cuttings.
     - Four candles, either taper or votive style: three purple and one pink; or four white candles with purple and pink ribbon to tie around the base of the candles.
     - Candle holders (glass or foil) or a way to attach the candles to the wreath, or set inside the wreath.
     - Pieces of wire, hammer and tacks or carpenter staples to attach the evergreen sprigs to the wreath base.

2. Introduce the Advent wreath activity by saying: The lighting of the Advent wreath is one of our most popular Advent traditions. Its origin is in pre-Christian Germany and Scandinavia where the people gathered to celebrate the return of the sun after the winter solstice. The circular wreath made of evergreens with four candles interspersed represented the circle of the year and the life that endures through the winter. As the days grew longer, people lit candles to offer thanks to the “sun god” for the light. For us, the lighting of the Advent candles represents the promise of the coming of Jesus, the light of the world. As the light of the Advent wreath grows, we share in the expectations of Isaiah, of John the Baptist and of Mary for the fulfillment of God’s promise to send a savior. We look forward to the coming of Jesus who pierces the darkness of sin by the light of his love. (From: Celebrating Advent in Your Home by Kathryn Schneider and Robert Hamma. Catholic Update, C1191. St. Anthony Messenger Press.)

3. Provide the participants with a brief background on the significance of Advent and the Advent wreath. Include how the Advent wreath is used each week in your parish at Sunday liturgies and how it can be used at home.

- The Church’s liturgical year begins with the first Sunday of Advent.
- Advent begins on the Sunday nearest November 30th, which is the feast of St. Andrew, and lasts until December 24th.
The word Advent comes from the word *adventus* which means “coming.”

Advent is a season in the Church year when we remember how the Word of God became human in the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, which we celebrate on Christmas. During Advent we also reflect on and celebrate how Jesus comes into our lives and is present with us every day.

Advent is a time of hoping and working for a change of heart. We focus on being more open to the love of God in our lives, and the salvation offered through Jesus.

The Advent wreath is a tradition of the season. It is a symbol of our hope in Jesus Christ, who is the Light of the world.

The circle and evergreens on the Advent wreath remind us of God’s everlasting love which has no beginning and no end.

The four unlit candles on the wreath remind us of the four thousand years before Christ’s birth, a time of spiritual “cold and darkness” as humanity awaited the birth of the Messiah. They also represent the four weeks of Advent.

It is customary to use three purple and one pink or white candle on the Advent wreath. The purple reminds us of the need for sorrow for our sins. The pink or white candle reminds us of the joy and hope we share in Jesus, the Light of the World, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

Advent begins with the lighting of one purple candle on the first Sunday of Advent. The pink candle is lit the third week when the Advent focus shifts to the special joy of the Christmas event. The increasing light of each week reminds us that Christmas is closer, and Christ’s presence continues to grow and brighten our lives. It also reminds us that by being Christ’s light today, we can brighten the “darkness” we find in our lives and in the world around us.

4. Then distribute wreath-making materials and guide the participants in making a wreath. Depending on the plan you chose, they will either make one wreath as a group, or make individual wreaths for participants to take home.

Play some traditional Christmas carols as the wreaths are being made. If social time is not scheduled at the end of the program, consider providing refreshments while making the wreath.

Supplies needed for each wreath being made include:
- a circular base with four evenly spaced holes into which you will place the four candles (a round piece of styrofoam, available at craft shops, would be fine)
- evergreen branches
- four candles (three purple and one pink, or four white with purple and pink ribbons)
- four candle holders
- wire or staples to fasten the evergreens and candle holders to the base

Begin with the base. Place fresh evergreen branches over the base. You will find it helpful to place the styrofoam circle on a piece of cardboard (or other firm base for moving the Advent wreath). Attach the evergreen branches and candles to the base. If white candles are used, tie purple ribbon around three, and a pink ribbon around one.

5. Close with a blessing of the Advent wreaths. Use or adapt the following prayer. (You may want to write the responses on newsprint or poster board for all to see.)
Leader  Our help is in the name of the Lord.
All    Who made heaven and earth.

Leader  As we gather around these wreaths, we remember God’s promise. Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing.* The Word of the Lord.
All    Thanks be to God.

Leader  Let us now pray for God’s blessing upon us and upon this wreath. *(Short silence)*
Lord our God, we praise you for your child, Jesus Christ: Emmanuel, the hope of all people, the wisdom that teaches and guides us, the Savior of every nation. Lord God, let your blessing come upon us this Advent season. May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ’s promise to bring us salvation. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All    Amen.

Leader  Let us bless the Lord.
All    Thanks be to God.

**Extend this Activity**

- Add a Scripture passage or a prayer to the Advent wreath. Participants can add a weekly Scripture passage to the Advent wreath by selecting a reading (Old Testament or Gospel reading) from the Sunday or daily Lectionary readings in Advent. Participants can write a prayer for each week of Advent to pray before lighting the Advent wreath candle(s) for the week. Here are sample prayers for each week of Advent.

  **Prayer for the First Week of Advent:** *Come, Lord Jesus! Open our minds and hearts and souls as we wait for you to be born anew in our lives and in our family. Help us to experience your love in our family throughout Advent.*

  **Prayer for the Second Week of Advent:** *Come, Lord Jesus! Bring peace and healing into our family and our world. May we hear again your own prayer—“that we may be one.” May we prepare the way for you by being generous and forgiving.*

  **Prayer for the Third Week of Advent:** *Come, Lord Jesus! Come and stay with our family and friends—and all who are dear to us. May your light shine brightly so we can see you everywhere. Help us to spread your light and joy by giving freely and happily to all we meet.*

  **Prayer for the Fourth Week of Advent:** *Come, Lord Jesus! We hunger, we thirst, we wait for you! Come, Lord Jesus and do not delay!*
Variation: Advent Wheel Wreath

Begin the celebration of Advent by making Advent wreaths. They are concrete reminders to enter holy time. Individuals, families, and groups create wreaths using wheels from wagons, bicycles, toy cars, or even real tractors that will be put away for the winter. Choosing the wheel will be an important part of the activity. The size of the wheel can be determined by the age of the wreathmaker and the place where it will be displayed. For example, a preschoooler could decorate a tricycle tire to hang on her or his closet door. The building and grounds committee could decorate a large wheelbarrow wheel and set it up by the church’s front door. Very small wheels may be made into tree decorations.

You will need: wheels of many sizes; scissors; candles; dried branches, weeds, and flowers; evergreen branches; strings of lights; wire of various weights; and red or blue ribbon.

After explaining the wheel-wreath and its significance for Advent, let participants create their wreaths. Have on hand an assortment of greens, gnarly branches, and dried flowers and weeds, as well as candles and a string of lights that they may use for decorating.

Be available with whatever suggestions and help are needed, especially with younger children. Consider singing Advent and Christmas hymns as you work. Be enthusiastic about differences among the wreaths—each will be unique. Finish each wreath by tying a ribbon at the bottom and attaching a loop of wire or string at the top for hanging.
Activity for Families with Children
Jesse Tree

Activity Plan

1. Gather all the supplies you will need for the Jesse Tree activity.
   - To make the Jesse tree symbols: cardboard, poster board, construction paper, large file cards, and/or clear plastic transparency sheets that can be traced and colored with magic marker; aluminum foil, last year’s Christmas cards, (clay or dough can also work well), pens or pencils, crayons or colored makers, magazines for photos, tape or glue sticks, etc.
   - To make the Jesse tree: You will also need a bare tree (no leaves) or a series of branches that you can connect. Make sure the tree or branches are large enough for you to attach all of the Jesse Tree symbols. You may need several trees. Pot the “tree” or branches in a bucket using sand and stones to help it to stand erect.
   - If you assign Scripture stories to individuals or pairs, you will need to give them Bibles or a copy of their Scripture passage on a handout.
   - Purchase copies of The Jesse Tree by Diane Houdek (Catholic Update, November 1977, C1197) for all teachers and program leaders. (Call 800-488-0488 to order.)
   - Purchase copies of Advent – Reclaiming a Birthright by Kathy Mulhern (Youth Update, Y1197) for all of the adolescents. (Call 800-488-0488 to order.)

Alternative Format

Another way to create a Jesse tree without the “tree” is to use a very large sheet of poster board or foam core. Draw the outline of a tree on the poster/foam core and use this as a display for the Jesse tree symbols.

2. Prior to the session leaders should review The Jesse Tree by Diane Houdek (Catholic Update, C1197) and all of the Scripture passages from Stories of Advent – Making Your Jesse Tree that will be used in the session.

3. Introduce the Jesse tree activity to the group using the following commentary.

   Many of us have photographs of parents, grandparents, great-aunts and uncles, and great-grandparents. Some we actually knew, many we know only through stories. People who make up our family tree hold a fascination for us.

   So, too, the people who make up our family of faith tell us much about who we are and how we are related to God. As Christians we are part of the extended family of Jesus of Nazareth. His family tree is the story of salvation history, the story of a people chosen, spared and redeemed by God.

   Matthew’s genealogy (Mt 1:1-17), which we hear at Christmastime each year, tells us that Jesus was the son of David, Israel’s greatest king, and back even further, the son of Abraham, the first patriarch of the Hebrew people, the first person called by God. Out of this family line, God would take flesh and live among the people of earth.
From medieval times, Christians have been fascinated with visual representations of the family tree of Jesus. A stained glass window at Chartres Cathedral in France, built in the early 13th century, depicts a Jesus tree, representing the family tree of Jesse, the father of King David, that blossoms in the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the “Son of David.” This ancient tradition of the Jesse tree was revived in the mid-20th century as an Advent practice. (From The Jesse Tree by Diane Houdek. Catholic Update, November 1977, C1197)

Continue with…

The Jesse tree represents Jesus’ family tree. The name is taken from Isaiah 11:1, in which Jesus is referred to as a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse, the father of David. The ornaments on the Jesse tree tell of Jesus’ ancestors, and of the events leading to Jesus’ birth. While it is hard to establish when and where the custom of the Jesse tree began, it most likely started in the Middle Ages as a way to teach Bibles stories. A Jesse tree is a bare branch that holds symbols of people from the Old Testament who waited and prepared for Jesus. Tradition has it that the love and preparation given the Jesse Tree would make flowers burst forth from the branch. This is why a bare branch, rather than an evergreen, is used.

Roots are important parts of a tree. As people, we need to know our roots, as well. Often, we run from one thing to another without reflecting on where we have been or where we are going. As we create a Jesse tree during this Advent season, let us pause and look at the great people of faith upon whose shoulders we stand.

To give the group a sense of Jesus’ family tree, read the genealogy of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1:1-17. (Do your best with all the names.) Make the connection between the Jesse Tree activity and the genealogy of Jesus. Note how many of the people in the genealogy are included on the handout, Stories of Advent—Making Your Jesse Tree.

Activity Option: Your Family Tree
To illustrate what a genealogy looks like, consider drawing your own family tree on a sheet of newsprint or poster board and presenting it to the group at this time.

4. On the handout, Stories of Advent – Making Your Jesse Tree, you will find prominent people from the Bible, the references to where you can find their stories, and suggested symbols that represent each person. Use the following process to create tree ornaments for the Jesse tree.
   a) Select the people from the handout, Stories of Advent, for whom you are going to create symbols. (Depending on how the program is organized a particular age group may study several people or the entire list.)
   b) Read the passage(s) from the Bible as indicated on the handout, Stories of Faith. For older children and adolescents, you can assign individuals or pairs one Bible person from the list to read. (You may want to make copies of the handout for each person or write the contents of the handout on a sheet of newsprint or poster board.) For younger children, you will need to read the Bible stories and guide them in creating symbols.
   c) Create your symbol to hang on the Jesse Tree. For each symbol: include the person(s) name, the symbol artwork, and a brief quote from the Scripture passage that captures the character or contribution of the person.

You can make the symbols out of cardboard, construction paper, or clear plastic transparency sheets that can be traced and colored with magic marker; aluminum foil, last
year’s Christmas cards, clay or dough. Run a string through the top of each ornament for hanging on the tree.

5. Invite the individuals or pairs to share their Jesse tree ornament by introducing their person to the group, the symbol, and the brief quote from Scripture that they included on their ornament.

6. Close by praying The Magnificat (Luke 1:44-57) together. Consider giving each person a copy of The Magnificat to take home. Encourage them to take it home and pray it every night during the remaining days of Advent, asking Mary to give them the courage to approach God with humility and an openness to God’s will and spirit in their lives during this Advent season.

**Additional Resources**

*Advent Stories and Activities – Meeting Jesus through the Jesse Tree.* Anne Neuberger. (Mystic CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1997)
This book introduces the Advent tradition of keeping a Jesse Tree, and offers 24 ancient stories and symbols (from creation to the nativity) to mark the days before Christmas for children of all ages.

*Tree of Hope: Our Advent Celebration.* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press)
This 32-page booklet contains 14 Jesse tree “ornaments” to color, with prayerful material to help you reflect and celebrate. (Single copy: $1.25, bulk discounts available. Call 800-488-0488.)

**Variations and Extensions**

- **Family Tree of Faith:** Have the children and adolescents make a genealogical tree for their own family. Have them do the research by asking older relatives to share their knowledge about the family’s history. Ask them to identify their family’s “people of faith” and the unique gift or strength or characteristic they possessed. During the session, ask the participants to create a symbol for each person. These symbols can be placed on the family Christmas tree.

- **Parish Tree of Faith:** A parish can make a “parish tree of faith” or other similar listing of people who have been important to the church family, such as pastors, pastoral associates, lay ministers, catechists, teachers, janitors, parishioners, and the like. Place these people’s names in a prominent place at the beginning of Advent, and invite the parish to stop by, read the “tree,” and offer prayers for those listed on it.

**Family Connection**

- **Family Tree of Faith:** Provide each family with a copy of *The Jesse Tree* by Diane Houdek (Catholic Update, November 1977, C1197) and invite families to read one Scripture passage each day and talk about the importance of the individual person of faith. (Call 800-488-0488 to order.)
### Stories of Advent—Making Your Jesse Tree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam and Eve</td>
<td>Genesis 3:1-24</td>
<td>an apple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Genesis 6:11—9:17 (or 8:21—9:17) (or Genesis 6:5-9, 7:7-16, 8:13-17, 9:12-16)</td>
<td>ark or rainbow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abraham and Sarah</td>
<td>Genesis 12:1-7, 15:1-6</td>
<td>camel, tent or star</td>
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<td>Isaac</td>
<td>Genesis 22:1-19</td>
<td>ram</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Genesis 25:19-34; and 27</td>
<td>a well</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Genesis 28:10-22 or 32: 25-31</td>
<td>a ladder</td>
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<td>Rachel and Leah</td>
<td>Genesis 29:15-30</td>
<td>a veil</td>
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<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Genesis 37:3-4 and 17-36; 50:15-21 (or Genesis 37:1 — 45:28)</td>
<td>coat of many colors</td>
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<td>Moses</td>
<td>Exodus 3:1-15; Exodus 20:1-21</td>
<td>bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahab</td>
<td>Joshua 2:1-21</td>
<td>rope</td>
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<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Joshua 6:1-20</td>
<td>trumpet</td>
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<td>Deborah</td>
<td>Judges 4:1-16</td>
<td>palm tree or tent peg &amp; mallet</td>
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<td>Gideon</td>
<td>Judges 7:1-8, 15-20</td>
<td>torch</td>
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<td>Samson</td>
<td>Judges 13:1-5; 15:14-17</td>
<td>jawbone</td>
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<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Ruth chapters 1 — 4</td>
<td>anchor (for faithfulness) or grains of wheat</td>
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<td>Hannah</td>
<td>1 Samuel 1:1-20, 24-28; 2:18-20</td>
<td>small robe</td>
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<td>oil</td>
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<td>David</td>
<td>1 Samuel 16:1-16</td>
<td>stringed instrument or Slingshot or crown (for king)</td>
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<td>Solomon</td>
<td>1 Kings 3:4-15</td>
<td>crown or scepter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>1 Kings 19:3-13; 2 Kings 2:1-5, 9-13</td>
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<td>Jonah 1:1-17; 2:10; 3:1-3</td>
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<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>Isaiah 9:1-6 and 11:1-9</td>
<td>branch or lion and lamb</td>
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<td>Ezekiel</td>
<td>Ezekiel 37:1-14 and 24-28</td>
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<td>Esther</td>
<td>Esther 2:17-18; 3:8-15; 4:7-16; 7:10</td>
<td>crown</td>
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<td>Malachi</td>
<td>Malachi 4:1-6</td>
<td>sun</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Luke 1:5-25</td>
<td>a home, angel, temple or altar</td>
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<tr>
<td>John the Baptist</td>
<td>Luke 1:57-80</td>
<td>shell and water or a reed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Matthew 1:18-25</td>
<td>hammer or saw</td>
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Activity for Adolescents
Advent Calendar Making

Introduction
The Advent Calendar Making program features a prayerful and creative activity to help young adolescents chart their path of preparation for celebrating Christ’s coming at Christmas. Participants are reminded of the spirit of the Advent season, a time of waiting and making room for the Christ child to be born among us. Each participant will leave with a personalized Advent calendar containing reminders of things to do to prepare for Christmas.

Session Overview (80 minutes)
1. Introduction / Focusing Activity (10 minutes)
2. Reflection on Waiting (15 minutes)
   - Handout: Worth Waiting For and Group Sharing
   - Presentation about Advent
3. God’s Call and our Responses (25 minutes)
   - Scripture Reading and Reflection
   - Brainstorming Ideas for Responding to God’s Call
4. Activity (30 minutes)
   - Advent Calendar Making

Materials Needed
- Handout: Advent Calendar Ideas
- Handout: My Advent Calendar
- Handout: Worth Waiting For
- Bible
- Pens / pencils for participants
- Easel and newsprint for presentations
- Masking tape
- Newsprint / markers
- Christmas music and cassette or CD player
- Supplies to make Calendar covers: (depends upon option selected)
  - construction paper
  - scissors
  - magazines
  - used Christmas cards
  - markers
  - glitter
  - glue / glue sticks
- Refreshments for the end of the session.
Advance Preparation

Advance
- Read through the Session Plan
- Gather the needed supplies. For example, ask for donations of magazines and used Christmas cards.

Calendar Option
To simplify the activity and save time, you will want to prepare for the calendar making in advance. Using the Leader Resource: Calendar Options, select the best option based on your community and resources. If you select the construction paper calendars, be sure to arrange for volunteers to help prepare this option in advance.

Immediate
- Make the “Meeting in Progress – Please Wait” sign to be posted on the door for focusing activity.
- Create newsprint posters for the four “Calls” described in the Scripture reading. You will need at least one poster for each call. If you expect a large number of participants, you may need two sets of newsprint posters. The four calls are
  1. We are called to prayer
  2. We are called to be peacemakers
  3. We are called to share
  4. We are called to love

Session Plan

1. Introduction / Focusing Activity (10 minutes)

To gather for this activity, adapt the following idea to your climate and facilities. Rather than welcoming the youth into the room where you will meet, place a sign on the door that states: Meeting in Progress – Please Wait. With the leaders and participants, find a place to stand and wait for the room to be ready. After five to seven minutes, have someone check the room and invite everyone in to find a seat.

In these or similar words, welcome the group: Welcome, I apologize that the room wasn’t ready for us. How did it feel to have to wait? What did you want to do instead of waiting?

(Gather ideas from group)

I cannot tell a lie. We did this on purpose as a way to experience together what it means to wait. In our culture, waiting is sometimes a hard thing that we try to avoid, like waiting in line at the movies or an amusement park, or waiting for our favorite show to start on TV, or waiting (desperately) for vacation to start! In fact sometimes we alternate between rushing to get somewhere and waiting to start. “Hurry up and wait,” as they say.
2. Reflection on Waiting (15 minutes)

Reflection Activity

Introduce the reflection activity in these or similar words:

Waiting is a part of our lives – but the experience of waiting is not always the same. We can be frustrated or bored while waiting for some things. Sometimes waiting means that we end up with extra time on our hands that we didn’t count on. We don’t like to “waste” time, so we often try to find some way to fill the time.

For other events, the waiting is part of the experience because we are anticipating something special and because we have things to do to get ready while we are waiting for the special event. Waiting can be fun – some of the most important occasions in our lives are ones that are worth waiting for: a special birthday celebration for instance, or a visit from a special person living far away. Part of the joy of the celebration is the anticipation – the getting ready.

With special occasions, there are usually important things to do and people to be with while we are preparing for the event. What are some special events or occasions that we wait for and we get ready for while we are waiting?

List responses on newsprint. Add additional ideas if needed. Here are several examples.

- Preparing for a special guest to come to your home
- Getting ready for an older brother or sister to return home from college
- Preparing for a birthday celebration
- Planning for a vacation or holiday
- Preparing for graduation

Distribute a copy of the Handout: Worth Waiting For and a pencil to each participant. Explain the next activity in these or similar words:

Using your worksheet, take a few minutes to reflect on waiting by choosing one event from our list or one from you own life. What are some of the ways that you and/or your family might prepare or get ready for this special event? For example, we wait for the chance to celebrate someone’s birthday and while we are waiting we usually think about that person, we select or make a birthday card or gift, we get the house ready for a celebration, we call friends and talk about the party and other special things to do to celebrate their birthday. After working individually you will have the chance to share in your group some of the ways that we spend our time while waiting and preparing for a special occasion.

Allow five minutes for individual reflection, then form small discussion groups. In the large group model, divide into learning groups or groups of six to eight. Each group will need a Learning Guide or group facilitator. (If groups are new to the participants, allow a few minutes for introductions.)

Allow ten minutes for individuals to share their responses to the handout in small groups. Here are several sample starter questions for the small group discussion.

- How do we spend our time waiting and preparing?
- What were the most common ways people prepare for a special occasion?
- Which responses were unique to an individual?
After several minutes of small group discussion, gather in a large group and ask for a sampling of ideas that were shared.

Presentation
Transition from “waiting” to highlighting some key ideas about the season of Advent.

We have shared together things we do personally or as a family to prepare for a special event. Our faith community also sets aside seasons of time to prepare for our most important church celebrations. Today’s program focuses on the upcoming season of Advent, which we celebrate in our faith community as a time dedicated to **waiting**.

♦ Advent, which means “coming,” is a time when we remember that the world waited for Jesus who was the perfect and complete gift of God’s love.
♦ Jesus is always with us, but we take this particular time to prepare and wait to celebrate Jesus’ birth at Christmas.
♦ In a special way, we celebrate the hope that Jesus brings, and our call to continually grow in our love and faith in God. This growth is called conversion.
♦ Jesus is also called Emmanuel, which means God with us. At Advent we take time to recall and celebrate that Jesus, as God, became human like us to show us the way to live and love.
♦ Advent is also a time to remember God’s call to love and share. We can prepare for Christmas by praying, by being generous, by being kind, and by serving others.
♦ To celebrate Advent, we can choose to do things that we hope will help us prepare for Christmas. We can also choose to not do things as a way of making more room for prayer and sharing.
♦ One of the traditions of celebrating Advent is to use an Advent Calendar to count off the days until Christmas, and help us focus on our preparation for this holiday as a “holy” day.
♦ Today we will each make an Advent Calendar that will help us to focus on preparing for Christ’s presence at a time when all of the stores and commercials are trying to get us to focus on Christmas as a time of material gifts and money!

3. God’s Call and Our Responses (25 minutes)

Introduce this portion of the session by saying:

*Our waiting during Advent is “hopeful” waiting, which means we are hoping and believing in something good in the future. We want to be sure that we don’t waste our time of waiting during Advent. We want to use our time well in preparing to celebrate Christmas, and the gift of Jesus as the Messiah. So what might we do during this time of Advent? As Christians, how are we called to prepare for Christmas?*

Let’s listen together to a part of the letter from St. Paul to the Philippians. As you listen, what does St. Paul remind us that we are called to do? How would St. Paul suggest we spend our time waiting for Christmas to come?

Scripture Reading and Reflection
Ask someone to read Philippians  4: 4-9

*St. Paul is writing to us today as much as he was to the people of his own time. What are some of the things St. Paul suggests we are called to do and to be as people of faith? How are we to spend our time waiting?*
Ask for some sample responses from the group. After several responses, suggest that Advent is an opportunity to reflect on four particular ways we are called to be God’s people, and to show that we belong to Christ Jesus.

Introduce the four “Calls” that will be the focus of discussion by posting each one on a separate sheet of newsprint:

1. We are called to prayer
2. We are called to be peacemakers
3. We are called to share
4. We are called to love

**Group Activity**

This activity engages participants in brainstorming practical ideas of things they can do during Advent to live out the four “Calls” suggested in Scripture. The activity can be done either as one large group or facilitated in multiple small groups.

Explain that groups will be asked to create a list of ideas for things to do as a response to each “Call.” These lists should be practical ideas of things we can do this Advent season as a way to live out the “Call” while preparing for Christmas.

To help initiate the process, present and list some examples. For instance, as a response to our call to pray, we could write down a list of people we want to pray for and put the list in our pocket to remind us to pray for these special people during the day. As a response to our call to share, we could choose a charity organization and set aside some of the money that we would use for entertainment or extra clothes to be donated to an organization doing what Jesus would want done.

**Option: One Group**

If there are fewer than sixteen participants facilitate the process as one group. Present and post the four “Calls” on newsprint. Spend five to eight minutes brainstorming ideas with the group for one of the “Calls,” then move on to the next. Continue until ideas have been generated for all four newsprint sheets. If possible, post the newsprint sheets in four different parts of the room and ask participants to move from one area to the next as you facilitate the brainstorming process.

**Option: Multiple Small Groups**

If there are more than fifteen participants, divide the participants into groups of six to ten with a facilitator. Post the four “Calls” on newsprint in four different parts of the room. Assign each group to one newsprint sheet. Allow ten minutes for brainstorming of ideas, then ask groups to rotate to a different newsprint sheet and allow five minutes for them to add ideas to the posted list. Continue until each group has responded to each of the four “Calls.” If your group is very large (more than 50), post duplicate sets of newsprint sheets.

**4. Activity** (30 minutes)
Distribute the **Handout: Advent Calendar Ideas** and the **Handout: My Advent Calendar**. Leaders should be available to assist the young adolescents while they are creating their calendars. Encourage leaders to make a personal Advent calendar as well.

Introduce the activity in these or similar words: *Now is the time when we get the chance to choose some of these ideas as personal reminders of what we hope to do during this Advent season as we wait and prepare for Christmas. You will each create a personal Advent Calendar.*

Explain the following process for making a calendar.
Select 24 ideas from the ideas on the newsprint lists, the ideas listed on the **Handout: Advent Calendar Ideas** and your own ideas. (The 25th idea is already provided on the calendar.)

1. Place each idea chosen into a box on the **Handout: My Advent Calendar**.
2. Explain how to complete the Calendar based on the option selected.

**Note:** While participants are making calendars play some Christmas music in the background.
Worth Waiting For....

Directions
1. Choose one event or special occasion to focus on for this activity.
2. Brainstorm and describe how you would prepare or get ready for that event. What would you do while you are waiting for the day of the event to arrive?
3. List out the actions or steps you would take to get ready for the special occasion.

Event or Special Occasion

Ways to Prepare and Things to Get Ready While Waiting
# Advent Calendar Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shovel someone’s walk or rake leaves on someone’s yard without being paid.</th>
<th>With your allowance or personal money, purchase a gift for a child – donate it to your parish or school gift drive.</th>
<th>Visit a friend or relative in a nursing home, or write a Christmas greeting letter to a resident at a nearby retirement home.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share a cheerful “Merry Christmas” with three adults you pass by today.</td>
<td>Collect and drop-off non-perishable food items at a local food pantry.</td>
<td>Create a card for a child in the hospital, or someone in your parish who is homebound or sick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write down a list of three people you want to pray for. Keep the list with you and pray for each person today.</td>
<td>Play a game with your family, instead of watching television tonight.</td>
<td>Find a special quiet place and pray for those in need in your family, your neighborhood and our world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time with a younger brother, sister or neighbor, reading, playing a game, or making a Christmas ornament.</td>
<td>Lead the meal prayer tonight – share something you are thankful for and ask others to do the same.</td>
<td>Ask a parent or older sibling how you can be of help to them today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give up television for today and spend the time thinking about the kind of person that Jesus wants you to be.</td>
<td>In the Bible, read Luke 1:39-52. Spend time thinking today: What has God done for me that I am especially thankful for?</td>
<td>Write a note to another family member telling them what you appreciate about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for someone who is left out or alone at school today and spend time with them during recess or lunch break.</td>
<td>Ask a parent to share a story about Christmas when they were growing up.</td>
<td>Help a child create a list for Santa, talk to them about gifts they might ask for that don’t cost money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a letter to a grandparent, an aunt or an uncle – share with them a wish you have for their new year.</td>
<td>Take ten minutes in a quiet place or on a walk and talk to God about something that is bothering you – ask God for help.</td>
<td>Write down a list of things you are thankful for. Spend time saying “Thank You” to God in prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a Christmas decoration for a room or table in your house that is a reminder of what Christmas is really about.</td>
<td>At the library or church, read about St. Nicholas. Think of two ways you could be like St. Nick during Advent.</td>
<td>Clean a part of the house without being asked or paid, just to surprise your parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help make dinner, and create a special atmosphere in which to share the meal as a family.</td>
<td>Forgive a friend who hurt you, and let them know they are forgiven.</td>
<td>Be especially nice to someone who bothers you today.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### My Advent Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>9</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24 Christmas Eve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25 Christmas Day!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Spend the day with loved ones celebrating God’s gift of Jesus. Take some time to thank God for this special day.*

**Calendar-Making Options**
Preparing in advance for the calendar-making will help this activity run smoothly and meaningfully for the participants and the leaders. Choose one of the following options for creating the Advent Calendars.

Option 1: Construction Paper Windows

This option requires the most advance preparation.

Objective

Create a construction paper Calendar with 25 “windows” in which can be placed personal Advent preparation ideas.

Supplies Needed

- Construction paper: 12 x 18 inches
  (Use Advent colors of dark blue, purple and pink.)
- Exacto knife or scissors
- Glue

Decoration Supplies (for youth to use during the activity)

- Markers
- Magazines
- Used Christmas cards
- Stickers
- Glue
- Glitter

Instructions for Creating the Calendar

1. You will use two sheets of 12 x 18 construction paper per calendar, one for a cover and one for a back.
2. Using scissors or an exacto knife, cut 25 “Windows” spaced throughout the cover. The windows can be approximately 1” high and 2” wide. The size of the window opening should match the size of the blank squares on the Handout: My Advent Calendar. Cut the window on three sides, creating a flap at the top and a window that opens at the bottom.
3. Number the windows 1 to 25.
4. Place glue on the outside edges of the back sheet of construction paper and adhere the front “window” cover to the back sheet.

Instructions for Youth during the Calendar Activity

1. Select a construction paper Calendar.
2. Cut your calendar ideas into squares 1-25.
3. Glue the calendar idea squares inside the corresponding “window.”
4. Decorate your calendar using the available supplies; be careful not to cover or glue down the window flaps.
To use Calendar and Count-off Days
Open the window for the day.

Option 2: Poster with Post-Its

This option requires little advance preparation.

Objective
Create a poster with 25 post-it notes covering the personal Advent ideas.

Materials Needed
- Poster boards: approximately 24” x 36” (one for each participant)
- Post-it notes: 2 ½” square, multicolored – blue, purple and pink if possible (25 notes per participant)

Decoration Supplies (for youth to use during activity)
- Markers
- Magazines
- Used Christmas cards
- Stickers
- Glue
- Glitter

Instructions for Youth during Calendar Activity
1. Select a poster and a pad of post-it notes (you will need 25 notes).
2. Cut your calendar ideas into squares 1-25.
3. Glue the calendar notes onto the poster leaving 2” as a border between each Advent preparation idea.
4. Cover each preparation idea with a post-it note.
5. Number the outside of the post-it note to match the corresponding number for the idea.
6. Decorate the notes and the poster – be sure not to cover or glue down the post-it notes.

To use Calendar and Count-off Days
Remove the post-it for the day.

Option 3: Calendar with Stickers

This option requires little advance preparation.
Objective
Create a calendar which uses Christmas stickers to count off the days during Advent. Provide each participant with an envelope containing Christmas stickers to use throughout the Advent season. At the end of each day during Advent, participants will place a sticker over the corresponding idea they have done for that day. The calendar becomes filled with holiday stickers as Christmas approaches.

Supplies Needed
- Packets of Christmas stickers (each participant will need 25 stickers)
- Dark blue, purple and pink construction paper, 12” x 18” (one sheet for each participant)

Decoration Supplies (for youth to use during activity)
- Markers
- Magazines
- Used Christmas cards
- Stickers
- Glue
- Glitter

Instructions for Youth during Calendar Activity
1. Select a piece of colored construction paper.
2. Cut your calendar ideas into squares 1-25.
3. Glue the calendar idea squares onto the construction paper, allowing space between each idea.
4. Decorate your calendar using the available supplies; be careful not to cover up the idea squares.
5. Select a set of Christmas stickers, and staple the envelope to the calendar keeping the flap open to allow access to the stickers.

To use Calendar and Count-off Days
At the end of each day, place a Christmas sticker over the Advent preparation idea that you have done which corresponds to that day.
Activity for Adolescents
Advent Wreath

Introduction
Participants will learn about the liturgical year, the season of Advent and the importance of rituals and symbols to help us celebrate Christmas as a “holy day” rather than simply a “holiday.” They will learn how to make an Advent wreath and be provided a prayer service to lead with their families during the Advent season.

Program Overview (60-80 minutes)
1. Introductions and Focusing Activity (10 minutes)
2. Presentation: Seasons of the Church (10 minutes)
3. Group Discussion: Differing Views on Preparing for Christmas (10-15 minutes)
4. Presentation: The Advent Season (5 minutes)
5. Wreath Making (15-30 minutes)

Materials Needed
- Handout: The Liturgical Year: Seasons of Our Church
- Handout: Advent – Did You Know?
- Handout: Advent Wreath Lighting Prayer
- Leader Background Articles: (One copy of each article is included with FaithWays, purchase additional copies from St. Anthony Messenger Press at 800-488-0488.)
  - The Liturgical Year – How Christians Celebrate Time by Sandra DiGidio, O.S.M. Catholic Update C1195.
  - The Lectionary and the Liturgical Year by Thomas Richstatter, O.F.M. Scripture from Scratch N0795.
- A liturgical calendar poster (Optional. Available from Liturgy Training Publications at 800-933-1800)
- Several sheets of Christmas wrapping paper (with a simple design)
- Large markers and tape
- Christmas music and a tape or CD player
- Matches
- Purple, or dark blue cloth (optional)
- Clean-up supplies
- Advent wreath-making supplies (Note: the supplies listed will be needed for each wreath to be made. If individual participants are making wreaths, each person will need the supplies listed.)
  - A circular base to which you can attach evergreen boughs. The base can be made from a variety of materials such as: vine wreath, wood, wire mesh, Styrofoam, modeling clay, compressed straw, a florists’ sponge wreath form, or a straightened coat hanger shaped into a circle. Check a local craft store or craft catalog for options.
• Evergreen sprigs or boughs sprayed with water to reduce drying. If you are able to collect boughs in your area, involve the young adolescents in cutting and trimming them. Provide old scissors or hand shears for cutting. If boughs are not readily available in your area, ask parishioners to donate trimmings from their Christmas trees the Sunday prior to the program. Provide several buckets of water near the church entrance for collection of the cuttings.
• Four candles, either taper or votive style: three purple and one pink; or four white candles with purple and pink ribbon to tie around the base of the candles.
• Candle holders (glass or foil) or a way to attach the candles to the wreath, or set inside the wreath.
• Pieces of wire, hammer and tacks or carpenter staples to attach the evergreen sprigs to the wreath base.

Session Plan

1. Introductions and Focusing Activity (10 minutes)

Gather participants into their small groups. When participants have gathered in their small groups, the leaders should facilitate introductions and the focusing activity.

Each person should share their name, what season of the year they would like best if there were no school, and why they chose that season.

Dialogue
Lead a brief dialogue about the changes and seasons of nature. Use the following questions as a guide:

■ How do you know when the season has changed from Spring to Summer, to Fall, to Winter, to Spring?
■ If you woke up from a long coma and did not know the date, how would you know what season it was? (If you woke up from a coma, how might you determine what season it is in the liturgical calendar — what would be some clues you could look for?)
■ If someone who had never experienced the changes of seasons ask you why there are seasons, and how can you tell them apart, what would you tell them?

2. Presentation: Seasons of the Church (10 minutes)

Distribute the Handout: The Liturgical Year: Seasons of Our Church, and post a liturgical calendar “poster” on the wall, if available. Give a brief presentation on the seasons of the Church highlighting the following points. (Use the two Leader Background Articles for more information.)

■ The cycle of the Church seasons reflects the story of salvation — a story that began in the Old Testament. Youth have been exploring the Old Testament in their learning groups during the Fall.
Through the course of each year, the Church remembers and re-tells the story of Jesus’ life through the seasons of the liturgy — and each season is reflected in the vestments and environment at Mass.

The season of Advent which is about to begin, is a time of preparing and waiting for Christmas — a time when we celebrate both the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and the continued presence of Jesus in our lives today.

3. Group Discussion: Differing Views on Preparing for Christmas (10-15 minutes)

Activity

Introduce the next activity by saying: If Advent is a time of preparing for Christmas, then let’s consider several different views on getting ready to celebrate. What does the media say about getting ready for Christmas? How does your family get ready? And how do we as a Church get ready?

On a sheet of Christmas wrapping paper (one with a simple design so printing will be readable), draw lines down the page to form three columns. Title them Media, Family/Home, and Church (see example).

Ask the group to briefly describe what the media suggest Christmas is about, and how to get ready. Record their responses in the Media column of the wrapping paper. Then ask them to name some of the ways their family gets ready and celebrates Christmas, recording responses and noting any ethnic traditions that are named. And finally ask how the Church gets ready to celebrate Christmas, recording responses.

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways to Prepare for Christmas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shop til you drop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buy big gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buy new decorations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make a big meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>travel to visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>call long distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>send gifts express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

Review the lists that were created, pointing out the differences that are emphasized in preparing for Christmas, particularly between the media and Church.
Leader Comments
The media tends to focus primarily on Christmas as a “holiday,” whereas the Church focuses on Christmas as a “holy day.” The real meaning of Christmas is in the holy day — not the holiday! Sometimes it can be a challenge as a family to keep the two in balance, and not get consumed by the media blitz for glitz. The season of Advent is when the Church helps us remember what Christmas is really about.

4. The Advent Season  (5 minutes)

Presentation
Share with the young people the following explanation of Advent.

Advent is a time when we prepare to celebrate Jesus’ birth and reflect on how we welcome Jesus in our lives today. Imagine what it would be like if Jesus were literally coming to your house on Christmas. Consider what you would do to prepare to welcome him if you had four weeks to get ready. Now, consider that Jesus is already here among us!

Advent lasts four weeks beginning on the Sunday nearest November 30th. During Advent we prepare to celebrate how God became human through the birth of Jesus two thousand years ago. We also celebrate God’s presence through Jesus in our lives today. It is a time when we consider how we might open ourselves more fully to God — how we can “prepare to meet Jesus” each day in the people we meet and the choices we make. Just as your family has traditions and rituals to prepare for Christmas, so does our Church. One of the rituals and symbols we use during this season is the Advent wreath. Today we are going to make an Advent Wreath together, and learn about its meaning and use.

5. Wreath Making  (15-30 minutes)

Using the Handout: Advent — Did You Know?, explain the Advent wreath including its symbols and use during the Advent season. Include how the Advent wreath is used each week in your parish at Sunday liturgies.

Then distribute wreath-making materials and guide the youth in making a wreath. Depending on the plan you chose, they will either make one wreath as a group, or make individual wreaths for participants to take home. Play some traditional Christmas carols as the wreaths are being made.

Supplies needed for each wreath being made are

- a circular base
- evergreen boughs
- four candles (three purple and one pink, or four white with purple and pink ribbons)
- four candle holders
- wire or staples to fasten the evergreens and candle holders to the base

Attach the evergreen boughs and candles to the base. If white candles are used, tie purple ribbon around three, and pink ribbon around one.
The Liturgical Year
Seasons of Our Church

The Liturgical Year is a twelve month cycle which celebrates and retells the life and ministry of Jesus. It highlights significant people and events in the story of salvation. Celebrating the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year enables Christians to deepen their faith, discover ways to live as disciples, and celebrate Jesus’ presence in the life of the Church today. The Liturgical Year includes five major seasons, and begins the first Sunday of Advent.

**ADVENT:** Begins the Sunday nearest November 30th and ends December 24th. Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of Christ, when we reflect on how we might get ready to welcome Jesus into all aspects of our lives.

**CHRISTMAS:** Begins at the vigil December 24th and lasts until the Sunday after Epiphany (January 6th). We continue the celebration of Christ’s birth through the twelve days of Christmas. We remember the coming of the magi on Epiphany, and then the Baptism of the Lord the following Sunday. We then spend several weeks in “ordinary time” when we reflect on Jesus’ life and teaching.

**LENT:** Begins Ash Wednesday and lasts until Holy Thursday evening. Lent is a special time when we look at the meaning of Jesus’ life for us today. It is a time for us to consider how we might more closely follow Jesus in our life by making choices to give up the things that keep us from being better disciples, and give of ourselves in caring for others as Jesus would. The Paschal Triduum begins on Holy Thursday and lasts until evening prayer on Easter Sunday. The Triduum focuses on the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the three-day high point of the liturgical year when we “walk” with Jesus through his passion, death and resurrection.

**EASTER:** Begins Easter Sunday and lasts until Pentecost. The celebration of the resurrection continues for fifty days until Pentecost.

**ORDINARY TIME:** Begins on the Monday after the first Sunday following January 6th, and lasts until the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. The Tuesday before Ash Wednesday is also known as Mardi Gras. Ordinary Time begins again on the Monday after Pentecost and lasts until the day before the First Sunday of Advent. During Ordinary Time we hear stories of Jesus’ life and mission, and explore how we can live this mission in our ordinary days.

During each liturgical season the Presider wears a different color vestment: Advent — purple or dark blue; Christmas — white or gold; Lent— purple; Easter — white; Ordinary Time— green; Christ the King Sunday — white or gold; Pentecost— Red. For certain feast days a special color may be worn.
Advent—Did You Know?

κ The Church’s liturgical year begins with the first Sunday of Advent.

κ Advent begins on the Sunday nearest November 30th, which is the feast of St. Andrew, and lasts until December 24th.

κ The word Advent comes from the word adventus which means “coming.”

κ Advent is a season in the Church year when we remember how the Word of God became human in the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, which we celebrate on Christmas. During Advent we also reflect on and celebrate how Jesus comes into our lives and is present with us every day.

κ Advent is a time of hoping and working for a change of heart. We focus on being more open to the love of God in our lives, and the salvation offered through Jesus.

κ The Advent wreath is a tradition of the season. It is a symbol of our hope in Jesus Christ, who is the Light of the world. The design of the wreath symbolizes the following:

婍 The circle and evergreens remind us of God’s everlasting love that has no beginning and no end.

𝒷 The four unlit candles remind us of the four thousand years before Christ’s birth, a time of spiritual “cold and darkness” as humanity awaited the birth of the Messiah. They also represent the four weeks of Advent.

𝒷 It is customary to use three purple and one pink or white candle. The purple reminds us of the need for sorrow for our sins. The pink or white candle reminds us of the joy and hope we share in Jesus, the Light of the World, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

_preflight_  nowrap

𝒷 Advent begins with the lighting of one purple candle on the first Sunday of Advent. The pink candle is lit the third week when the Advent focus shifts to the special joy of the Christmas event. The increasing light of each week reminds us that Christmas is nearer, and Christ’s presence continues to grow and brighten our lives. It also reminds us that by being Christ’s light today, we can brighten the “darkness” we find in our lives and in the world around us.
Activity for Young Adults and Adults
Images of the Messiah

1. Introduction

This learning activity explores images of the Messiah as they are introduced in the Advent Lectionary and then developed throughout the Gospels. The focus Scripture readings for this activity are:

- Old Testament: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10 (Third Sunday of Advent-A) or Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-B),
- Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-A)

2. Small Group Reflection

Organize participants into groups of 4-6 people.

Invite the participants to take a moment for quiet reflection on their personal images of Jesus. After a period of reflection, ask the participants to share their reflections with the group. This is a storytelling experience so be sure each person has the time to share his or her story without interruptions or discussion.

- Personal Reflection: Close your eyes and relax. Call to mind the many images of Jesus Christ you have learned from the Gospels, from personal study and experience, from family and friends, from your ethnic tradition, and from your involvement in church life (ministry involvements, religious education, Sunday Mass, and other activities).

Which of these images of Jesus are the most personally meaningful for you? Which images best reflect who Jesus Christ is for you today? Capture an image in a key word or phrase. Can you recall a Gospel story that illustrates each of your images? Take a moment now to reflect on your image of Jesus Christ using the following questions:

- What does your image of Jesus Christ say about your thoughts and feelings about Jesus? What does it say about your thoughts and feelings about yourself?
- How does your image of Jesus Christ influence your relationship with him and the way you live your Christian faith?

- Storytelling: Share one of your most meaningful images of Jesus with the group, and then discuss the two reflection questions (above) as a group.
3. Exploration

Record the Images
Begin the exploration by recording the list of the images named by the participants in the reflection activity. Write these on newsprint for all.

Introduce the Exploration
The Advent Lectionary readings announce the coming of the Messiah and what will be the central theme of Jesus’ ministry and message: the coming of the reign of God (or kingdom of God). (See the Catechism of the Catholic Church 541-550.)

Through his actions and relationships Jesus gave witness to the meaning of the reign of God. As the Catechism states, “Jesus accompanies his words with many ‘mighty works and wonders and signs,’ which manifest that the kingdom is present in him and attest that he was the promised Messiah” (547).

The reign of God was present in and through Jesus and it was evident in the startling way in which he was able to touch and change the lives of those around him. When we look at what Jesus says and does, we see what God says and does. Jesus lives the great commandment to love God and neighbor without any limits. He expressed his love in specific actions of service, compassion, healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

It is very important to understand Jesus’ special concern for the poor and those on the margins of society. Jesus eats with the poor and sinners. He is a friend of tax gatherers and prostitutes and other unsound members of first century Jewish society. He cures the sick and heals the possessed, outcasts in Jewish society of the first century. All of these people are the “poor” or marginalized. They receive particular attention in the Kingdom because of who God is. God’s mercy and compassion for the defenseless assures benefits to the poor in the kingdom. (Catechism 544-45.)

Read the Focusing Scripture Passages
Read the three readings from the Advent Lectionary that present specific images of the Messiah:

- Isaiah 35:1-6, 10
- Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11
- Matthew 11:2-11

Explore Images of the Messiah in Small Groups
In small groups, ask the participants to review the readings and to identify specific images of the Messiah that surface. Then, ask them to recall specific stories from the Gospels that illustrate these images. Conclude by asking each group to name additional images of the Messiah found in the Gospels.

Share Reports with the Large Group
Invite the small groups to share the images that surfaced in the readings and Gospel stories that illustrate these images. Ask for additional Gospel images they identified.
Record the images on newsprint for all to see.

After the groups have shared, invite people to add comments and reflections on what they heard.

4. Reflection and Application

In small groups, ask the participants to discuss how the images of the Messiah relate to their own lives and faith in Jesus Christ.

- How did your personal images of the Messiah (Jesus Christ) compare to the images from the Advent readings and the Gospels, in general? How has your exploration affirmed and/or affected your personal images of Jesus Christ? Will any of your images change?
- What impact do the images of the Messiah from the Advent readings and the Gospels, in general, have on your relationship with Jesus Christ?
- What impact do they have on the ways that you live the Catholic faith?
- How will you pay special attention to the images of the Messiah in the Advent season and throughout the year?