



A simple Christmas wish

▶ *The Advent and Christmas seasons can be a time to reconnect with God's simple wish for his people*

By Christie M. Wills

THE AUTHORS OF "Unplug the Christmas Machine" write that most people dream of an ideal Christmas celebration that includes several universal elements: family, food and love.

Sometimes in the search for a Christmas that has meaning, we convince ourselves that joy is found in stuff, and that more stuff equals more joy. The toys and gifts form a pile that reaches halfway across the room.

But take a moment to think back to your most cherished Christmas memory. Really, is it about the stuff?

"A simpler Christmas leads to freedom. A consumer Christmas leads to stress and debt. Simplicity leads to generosity. Simplicity leaves more room in our hearts for joy. It is such a joy to get the burden of stuff off of our shoulders," said Gerald Iversen, retired director of Alternatives for Simple Living.

Several churches in the diocese have held opportunities for parishioners to help the world with their Christmas purchases for others. At the Alternative Gifts Fair at Christ Church, Roanoke, shoppers purchased fairly traded coffee and jewelry and made donations to charities such as Episcopal Relief and Development, Second Harvest Food Bank or Doctors Without Borders. They could also purchase donations of time such as the gift of a freshly baked pie each month for a year or 20 hours of yard work. All of the proceeds benefitted outreach ministries.

At Emmanuel, Bristol, each year the coordinators of the Alternative Giving Market invite representatives of local ministries, such as the Bristol Literacy Project and Boys' Home, to personally share their stories of outreach work. In exchange for a donation, shoppers are given an attractive gift card and envelope that states that a donation has been made to a charitable organization in the recipient's honor.

HERE ARE SOME other ideas to make your Christmas a gift to the world:

- **Send** Christmas cards to prisoners. This could be a project for a children's or adult Sunday School class.
- Instead of a regular gift exchange, consider exchanging toys, then **donate** the toys to a children's charity.
- Rather than allow the gift-opening to be the highlight of the season, **plan** a special family activity each week of Advent. One week could be "Kids Plan a Meal for Mom and Dad," and another week could be a family outing in the woods to look for seasonal decorations.
- Set aside an amount for charity and sit down together to **choose** a recipient for a family donation. Heifer Project and ERD have printed and online gift catalogs. Or consider making the donation toward the Stop Hunger Now diocesan event to be held at Annual Council on Jan. 24.

To read more about challenging consumerism or to order copies of "Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?" and "Unplug the Christmas Machine," visit simpleliving.org or call 800-821-6153.

Holy One, thank you for all your gifts. May the peace of Christ fill our hearts with generosity this Christmas and all year.



Photo by Shannon Woodward