

Christmas

The Richness of Existence Rather Than on Having Possessions

Dear brothers and sisters,

Greetings for Advent and Christmas season!

We are both working in JPIC office in the Curia. As we are preparing ourselves for the celebration of God's mystery of incarnation, we would like to provide you some alternative options regarding holiday gifts. It's all about the new lifestyle for Franciscans and our spirituality.

Spiritual Background

Advent has begun.

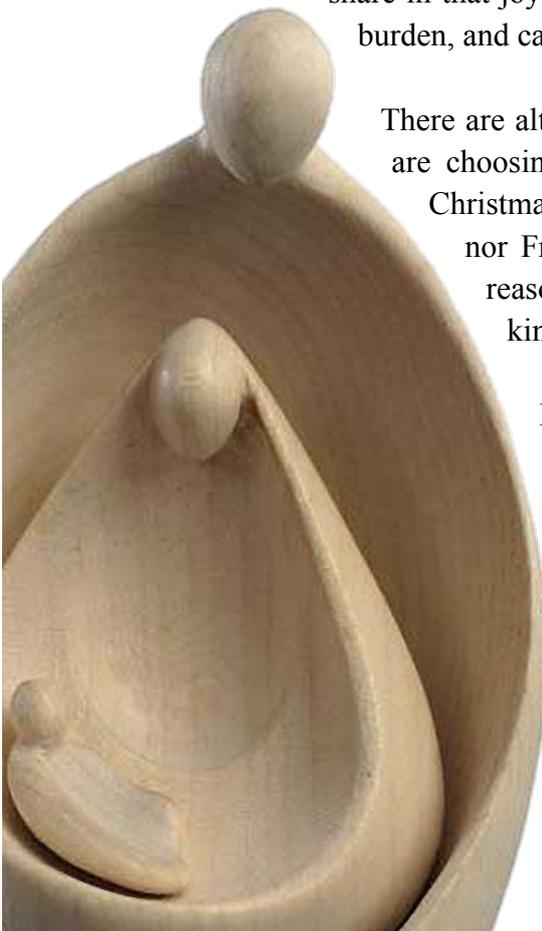
For us Franciscans, Christmas is when we celebrate the mystery of God; it's not just a festive season. Like St. Francis, who celebrated the mystery of the Incarnation in Greccio, Italy. We also commemorate that God, in the Word made flesh, has saved the world. The mystery of how God chose to be born in poverty in Bethlehem is the source of Franciscan joy at Christmas. So, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, we would like to share a few suggestions with you, keeping JPIC principles in mind, and letting you know about the "buy nothing at the holidays" movement.

Objectives

The joy of giving and receiving gifts is something special; the giver and the receiver both share in that joy. But buying lots of holiday gifts can become a real financial burden, and can clutter our lives with an overload of non-essentials.

There are alternatives to this, however, and increasing numbers of people are choosing not to buy gifts for the holidays, and instead spend the Christmas season differently. Many of these people are neither Christian nor Franciscan and they choose this practice because of financial reasons, or because they want to find sustainable alternatives to this kind of spending.

However, our objective is not purely economic — our purpose is to witness to our alternative and counter-cultural spiritual values, focusing on the richness of existence rather than on having possessions. It is also about opting out of a system of consumerism that sells comfort and joy at the expense of the earth and of the poor. Challenging the system that produces such a loss of life and peace can begin with little daily practices. After all, the spirituality that we pursue does not become a reality if we don't start by practicing alternative values in our everyday lives.



Suggestions

Here are some practical suggestions, adapted from various articles on the web.

- **Give time.** For many of us, time is much more valuable than stuff. Rather than bring a hostess gift to a party, offer to help clean up when the night is over. Take your niece or nephew to a concert or a basketball game. Spend an afternoon going through old photos with your grandmother.
- **Give an experience.** Instead of exchanging gifts, opt for an evening out, a trip to the movies, a movie night in, dinner at home or a holiday baking party. That expensive shopping day can turn into a day spent with your parents, something that you will cherish for a long time.
- **Give to charity.** It will be a wonderful alternative to traditional gifts. You can give a charity gift card with which the recipient can choose the charity that will receive the donation. It will be more fulfilling.
- **Give up gifts.** Make it clear to friends that you not interested in exchanging "little gifts" out of a sense of obligation. Give them the gift of freedom from that obligation to you.
- **Make do-it-yourself gifts.** Knit a sweater, make posters or DVDs with photographs of special times with friends and family, or create herb-infused cooking oils with herbs from your garden.
- **Give edible gifts.** Gourmet coffee or tea, homemade sweets, chocolates, a bottle of wine – all are likely to be more welcome than other knickknacks. And, they won't take up space in the house for years. Instead of exchanging gifts with co-workers, bring in bagels and coffee, when the holiday sweets are long gone.
- Finally, **consider a retro gift:** a card with a heartfelt handwritten message about how much your co-worker, teacher, friend, sister or brother, really means to you. Those kinds of gifts are much rarer, and more precious, than yet another scented candle.

We wish all of you a very happy Christmas!
May the Lord bless all of us!

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Office JPIC



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