

## Ideas for Advent and Christmas

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The Christmas season is coming soon (even if it did begin in the stores right after they took down the back-to-school displays), and for Christian educators everywhere, that means it's time to pull out the bathrobes and angel wings and prepare for the annual children's Christmas program. Of course, it's harder these days to find time for the children to gather for practices, and there are those who suggest that maybe putting our little darlings up on a stage to sing songs and look adorable for their grandparents isn't the best possible way to help them grow in their understanding of Christmas and all it means for us as disciples of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, acting out a Bible story enables it to come to life in new ways for many people. And let's be honest – kids of all ages like putting on costumes and pretending to be someone else for awhile! Many churches tap into that dramatic flair by putting on some version of a "Walk through Bethlehem" during Advent. Church basements are transformed into the streets of Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth. Costumed characters serve meals, help children to make Christmas-themed crafts, collect "taxes," and serve in live nativity scenes. Often, the guests at these events "register for the census" to get "coins" to spend at the booths, and sometimes they even get to dress up and become part of the story themselves. Not only is this sort of event great for families to attend together (as helpers or guests), it offers an opportunity to invite people who do not normally attend your church to come inside and see what a church family is all about.

Christmas caroling is a traditional favorite this time of year. It provides a fun way to share the Christmas message with neighbors or with homebound members of your church. RiversEdge UMC in Spring Bay, Illinois, puts an unusual twist on Christmas caroling – they bring llamas with them! Members of the congregation raise llamas, and graciously allow them to join in the caroling fun. The llamas are certainly an unforgettable sight as they approach your door with a group of carolers!

Whether it is singing the familiar Christmas hymns, joining in the liturgy, lighting candles, or putting up symbolic decorations, people of all ages respond to the rituals of Christmas in ways we don't fully understand. Ritual has a way of forming us, and involving many people in your church in Advent and Christmas rituals expands the rituals' potential for impacting people in a new way. For instance, many churches include families or people of different ages in the lighting of the Advent wreath during worship each Sunday. Anaheim (CA) UMC took this one step further, developing a tradition of inviting one family to light the Advent wreath and another family to build a crèche (nativity scene) one piece at a time. [Click here](#) to learn more and find scripts and directions to adapt this tradition to your church or Sunday school class.

Not all meaningful Advent activities are long-standing traditions, however. Wanda Stahl, Director of Spiritual Formation for the New England Conference, explains that her congregation has approached the Christmas season in a different way the past two years – by participating in the "Advent

Conspiracy” ([www.adventconspiracy.org](http://www.adventconspiracy.org)). The Advent Conspiracy “calls people to Worship More, Spend Less, Give More, and Love All,” reports Stahl. “A primary aspect of the challenge is to spend less on consumer oriented gifts and give more away. Our little congregation of around 60 mostly low income folks gave around \$2,000 away last year.”

What are some of YOUR church’s Advent or Christmas traditions, old or new? And how do they help make disciples in your particular setting? You can join in the discussion by joining the IGRC CEF Facebook group and clicking on the “Discussions” tab.