

Re-thinking Family Christmas Traditions

We speak of Christmas as a season of joy and peace. But the reality is that sometimes stress and friction reign in family life as the festive season approaches. What simple strategies can help to breathe peace into our Christmas experience? The following story, a snapshot from Vic and Liz's evolving family culture, offers food for thought. Says Liz:

'My memory of Christmas as a child is one of a family under stress. There was much shopping, cooking, wrapping and arranging. Our Christmas traditions had been handed down by previous generations and we remembered these family "giants" by doing things the way they "ought" to be done.

'When my husband and I married, we formed a new family. We were conscious of the traditions we both brought to this new entity. Early in our marriage, we talked about the common stress we had experienced as children. We resolved to create Christmas events that were people-friendly. In short we focused on the individuals in our family rather than the things we thought we had to do.

'By planning our celebration in this way, we developed natural traditions. For example, our family prayers have a central part in our celebrations and the mid-day lunch consists of a meal

in keeping with the boiling heat of Australia rather than the chill of the northern side of our planet. On Christmas Day each person has special tasks suited to his or her gifts and personality. "I get the drinks, Dad," or "I organise the music, Mum." "Don't forget, I make the rumballs." In other words, "Why have we gotta do this now" has become "I can do this now."

'Tailoring tasks to suit particular family members is sometimes messy and requires patience, especially with younger children, but the fruits of this patient planning are truly worth it. In this way we can tap into the essence of Christmas by giving of ourselves through service to others. It is an essential ingredient in our Christmas mix: that willingness of spirit that brings the peace of the Lord to each of our hearts.'

Family table topic: How might we re-think our festive habits this Christmas?

1. **Twelve steps to a Christ-centred Christmas**
2. Create a 'sacred space' in your home or garden - some holy symbols, a place to pray.
3. Send Christmas cards with a 'Christ' theme.
4. Let go of a grudge. Receive the sacrament of reconciliation.
5. Cancel a shopping day. Instead, enjoy some relaxed time with a loved one.
6. Pool your family funds to assist someone in need.
7. Make the Mass the focal

point of your Christmas Day celebrations.

8. Pray for world peace.
9. Say an extended grace before Christmas lunch.
10. Visit an isolated person - perhaps someone in jail, or in hospital.
11. Tell the nativity story to a child.
12. Write down (and carry out) your own 'top 12' ways to celebrate Christmas. •

