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FOR OUR HOMES:

This was our busy season, too. For many parents, we make it to December 26th and are just thankful for surviving the rush, the crush, the sugar highs, the "but I didn't get" lows. Did you try to be too many places simultaneously? Did you put yourself in charge of everyone's happiness ... and feel miserable that, despite your best efforts, it wasn't perfect or even appreciated? Did you overspend money, time, and energy and emerge just feeling drained?

Consider how December 2016 might be a time you cherish, savor, find balance, delight, and make wondrous memories with those you love best.

Gather as a family, taking time to assess:

- * What went well?
- * What did we enjoy?
- * What felt overwhelming?
- * What was stressful?
- * What do we want to do the same?
- * What do we want to do differently?
- * What do we not want to do again?
- * Where and when did we feel closest to Jesus?
- * What was disappointing?



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JANUARY 12, 2016

CHRISTMAS LESSONS

FOR CONGREGATIONS:

It's Epiphany. We celebrate the light of Christ illuminating all we do, as we journey with Jesus. What a perfect time to pause, reflect on the Advent and Christmas season, and harvest what we can learn from one of our congregation's busiest and highest impact times of the year.

If you plan your programs with a team - staff, parents, volunteers - gather them while the season is fresh in their minds. Tell them that you need their help to assess what you did this past Advent and Christmas and to plan for a deeply faithful season this year.

(If you don't plan your programs with a team, begin now to build a team. Gather those who participated in worship, learning, service, and fellowship. Ask those, too, that seemed conspicuously absent. Tell them that you need their help to assess what you did this past Advent and Christmas, to make it better next time.)

Light a candle. Pause in silence. Invite the discerning presence of the Holy Spirit to be with you, to make it clear what brought joy, what stirred up faith, what welcomed the stranger, what invited all to enter God's story. And invite the Holy Spirit to make it clear what you will not repeat in the future.

Where you gather, post large pieces of paper, labeled:

- I was here for ...
- I wasn't here for ... because ...
- Most meaningful to me
- Least meaningful to me
- I'd like to add
- I'd like to delete
- My household needs time away in order to ...
- My household needs help knowing how to ...

Invite all to share their feedback, either by writing on the paper or writing on small post it notes and attaching them to the large pieces of paper.

Gather around each large paper and take turns reading the comments aloud. What did you learn? What will you do the same? What will you do differently?

Ask for a volunteer to compile all of the comments. Share this in a concise way with the congregation and ask for their feedback or what they might add ... or delete.

This is the time to begin planning for next year. Invite people to choose the opportunities they would like to help plan and execute, as well as attend.

* Who else needs to know now
how we will do this next year?

This is the perfect time to look at
your calendar and how you will
spend your time. Consider, too,
how and on whom you will
spend your money. How will you
serve the Christ Child by serving
the neighbor?

Kids become mega-consumers
in the lead up to Christmas. We
fault them for being selfish and
focused on the most rankly
commercial aspects of
Christmas. But, do we give
them an alternative vision or
plan?

One family I am privileged to
know replaced the Christmas
wish list with a family list of
"ways and people we can
serve." Several times a week,
they did little acts of service
together. It made for a
memorable and loving Advent
and Christmas, in which they all
felt they had lived Christmas.

Beginning now, what can your
family do to make sure that
Jesus is at the heart of your
Christmas this year?

Remember that "more is not necessarily better." Give
space around your programs to invite each person to
savor the experience, share time with their faith family,
spend time in worship and prayer, serve God's family in
need, and hear, "I am bringing you good news of great
joy for all the people."

I promise that you are on your way to planning a
wondrous Advent and Christmas season.

The Living Room Summit
APRIL 26 - 28, 2016
Registrations are coming in!
limit of 15 people

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NEED SOME HELP?

Do you need some help gaining perspective, evaluating
your ministries, reestablishing your priorities, discerning
where God is calling your congregation now, and
engaging all to participate? This might be the time for
coaching with Marilyn Sharpe, a ministry partner who will
focus, inspire, and walk with you and your ministry team
to follow where God is leading.

CALL OR [EMAIL](#) NOW!

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