

Tangible Ideas from Fr Chris O'Donnell for Celebrating Advent and Christmas this year

There is a line that says 'We are an Easter People' – when it comes to Advent and Christmas, I think it is more a case of 'We are a Christmas' people. Advent seems to go under the radar and so we need to keep this in mind when offering ideas for advent as often it is a season that is overlooked – which is a pity but again that's just my take on it. However here are a few things that could encourage us to make the most of Advent:



Tangible things in Church

- Send drawings, photos, names of their families for us to stick on the seats in the Church. On this picture they can put what is the one thing above all they pray for this Christmas.
- Possibly have a map of the world where people can fill in the places where their family members are – if a map won't work, we could just put headings and ask people to write down where family are.
- Have a remembrance tree that people write the names of loved ones and hang them on the tree.
- Have a prayer space or prayer ideas around the crib.
- As the priest blesses the crib with holy water, the children could bless their crib at home with holy water.
- Could we put the crib outside?
- Advent Service – some parishes held annual services – could they do some online version. If not, maybe we could offer a Christmas hymn reflection – for example Silent Night has a lovely story behind it and equally we could just get people to reflect on some of the lyrics of a hymn and then have it sung so they listen differently.



Tangible things at Home

- Could we send the baby Jesus home to a different family each evening with a little prayer moment? (Obviously sanitising etc.)
- There is a tradition of adding straw to the crib with each kind deed we do by way of making sure the crib is comfortable for Jesus.
- Offer a prayer moment around the crib and the characters in the crib.
- At the Vigil you could have the youngest child place the Baby Jesus in the crib. Another member could bless the crib while the priest blesses the crib in Church. Light the Christ candle when the candle is lit at Church. Also at the end of Mass bring a candle to the window to keep up the Irish tradition.
- The word made flesh – use this to get people to do something tactile – hug, hold hands, God becoming flesh in and through them....a reflection as they hold hands maybe as a family.



Christmas Ideas

At 9pm on Christmas Eve we will do an online liturgy from Kilmallock Church (not necessarily a Mass) targeted at families. After this liturgy, or during it, we hope to have a family fun moment.

We are also looking at the possibility of locals who are abroad send greetings to local family here and equally local family here sending greetings to family who are abroad – without either group knowing that the process is being duplicated. It may be difficult, but it would be lovely to be able to play videos of local people who are abroad sending greetings home and vice versa.

Post-Christmas – 12 Days

Is there anything we could do afterwards?

- A nice family prayer left at cribs to encourage people to pray it when they visit. Leaving some chairs near the crib in the Church to encourage people to sit and stay a while.
- Could we encourage people to take on Bishop Brendan’s ten tips (below) for living your faith?

Living our Faith in a time of COVID-19 Ten Tips

TIP 1. Believe in Love. First things first! Christmas reminds us of God’s tenderness. We can heed St Peter’s advice to the First Christians: “Cast all your anxiety onto God, because he cares for you”.

TIP 2. Live the Present Moment. We normally spend so much time revisiting the past or planning the dreams of the future, but easily forget to focus on the present. St. Thérèse of Lisieux used to say: “You know that to love you, Lord, I only have today”

TIP 3. Love by Serving. Be the first to love not waiting for others to love us. Pope Francis reminds us that service, in great part, means “caring for vulnerability, for the vulnerable members of our families, our society, our people”.

TIP 4. Slow Down and Look Deeper. Everything is connected, everyone is connected! COVID-19 invites us to slow down, contemplate nature and care for the planet. But it also invites us to open our eyes to those suffering in other parts of the world, to live for universal fraternity and social friendship.

TIP 5. Build up your family as a “domestic church”. Everyone belongs to a family. Each of us can build up our family as a community of love for one another, a community of sharing and mercy. We can always start again to care for one another, every time we fail.

TIP 6. Mark Sunday in a special way. Gathering for Mass is at the heart of who we are. But if for some serious reason, we cannot get to Mass we should mark Sunday – participating in a liturgy online, reading the Mass Readings, spending time in quiet prayer, doing acts of love for people who are sick or alone.

TIP 7. Pay attention to small daily practices. We can nurture faith in simple ways: morning and evening prayers; grace before meals; blessing ourselves with holy water; brief visits to chapel, reciting the Rosary in full or in part, simple private moments of saying “thanks” to God for blessings we’ve noticed.

TIP 8. Tune into the liturgical seasons. For the Church, the year is marked by liturgical seasons. December is Advent time preparing for Christmas – the great season when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. We can ask ourselves: how can we capture the Christmas season in our home? Could we place the crib centre-stage in our homes this Christmas?

TIP 9. Discover the Word of God. Perhaps this might be a very good time to reopen a Bible. There is plenty of material online to help us read the Bible. To begin, why not read chapter two of Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, on the parable of the Good Samaritan.

TIP 10. Set out on pilgrimage. Pilgrimages are cherished events in the faith lives of Catholics, walking to a sacred place or church, being together, saying a prayer, lighting a candle. Individuals and families might consider pilgrimages to local churches or local holy sites, especially over the Christmas break. Just remember, we can never find time, we always have to make it!

For Christmas resources and prayers see www.limerickdiocese.org