

Simplifying Christmas and Fair Trade Gifts

Resources to help “de-consumerize” Christmas and to promote positive gifts made in a just manner.

Steps to Simplifying Christmas

1. Plan ahead to ensure appropriate ways to celebrate the birth of Christ. Have a meeting to decide how your school, class, parish, group and/or family can celebrate Christmas in a way that is joyous and simple.
2. Reflect carefully on all kinds of gifts you give or donate during the holiday season. Refrain from supporting companies that deny fair wages, healthcare, and other rights to their workers.
3. Give alternative gifts, such as crafts made by U.S. community groups or fair trade gifts from developing countries. Give a non-tangible gift, based on a donation to a non-profit: for example, Catholic Relief Service offers gifts that will provide education for children in poverty or provide aid in poor countries. See the lists on the following page for such gifts.
4. Give a percentage of your Christmas gift budget to an organization working for a just society.
5. Give of yourself—something you made or created, or a coupon book for future services you will personally provide.
6. Draw names in your giving circle, rather than everyone giving a gift to everyone else. Set a price ceiling.
7. When buying gifts for children, choose gifts that will help develop their creativity. Art supplies, building materials, music and books promote children’s development. Encourage multicultural books and toys.
8. Avoid gifts that promote a consumer culture, gender stereotypes, or violence.
9. Avoid stress. Stay away from overly-stimulating stores, malls, shopping centers, or at least give yourself a time limit in such places. Keep decorations simple (remember the stable). Have everyone do part of the work involved with your celebration. Give the gift of your peaceful presence to others—and the gift of peace and quiet to yourself. Enjoy music, good food and good company in a relaxed way.
10. Avoid debt. Set spending limits on gifts, cards, decorations, etc. Refuse to be pressured to overspend.
11. Remember to focus on the true meaning of Christmas: Jesus, who came into the world bringing a radical message about loving God and our neighbors. Remember also that Christ came with a special concern for the poor and the marginalized. Make them an important part of your Christmas celebration in any ways possible.

Adapted from “Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?” Alternatives for Simple Living, at <http://www.richmonddiocese.org/ojp/ojp119.htm> .

Alternate Gift Shopping Suggestions

- **Catholic Relief Services** promotes Fair Trade through its Work of Human Hands program, which brings fairly traded handcrafts, chocolate, and coffee from low-income producers all over the world. See http://www.crsfairtrade.org/index_flash.cfm.
- The **Catholic Campaign for Human Development** provides a list of groups involved in CCHD's Economic Development Program that offer gifts and crafts. See <http://www.nccbuscc.org/cchd/edshopping.htm>.
- **Monastery Greetings** is an online web catalog of marvellous products made by monks and nuns around the country. Your purchases support the work of these monasteries and convents. See their website at: <http://www.monasterygreetings.com/>
- **Global Exchange** offers an entire catalogue of fair trade products made by people in developing countries for the holidays at <http://store.gxonlinestore.org/>.
- **The Lion and Lamb** project has a parent-action kit, lists of positive toys, and other resources to help stop the marketing of violence to children at www.lionlamb.org.
- **The International Fair Trade Association** is a global network of fair trade organizations. The organization's mission is to improve the livelihoods and well being of disadvantaged producers by linking and promoting Fair Trade Organizations, and speaking out for greater justice in world trade. Fair trade organizations and products can be found at <http://www.ifat.org/memberslists/pacificmembers.html>.
- **SERRV International** at <http://www.serrv.org> promotes A Greater Gift markets, in which fairly traded handcrafts and foods from around the world can be bought through an online store.

- **Ten Thousand Villages** provides vital, fair income to people in developing countries by marketing their handicrafts and telling their stories. See <http://www.tenthousandvillages.com/> or call (717) 859-8100.



- **Heartbeats**, a religious gifts catalogue of inspirational gifts made by world artists, is a ministry of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary. See <http://www.heartbeatscatalog.org/> or call (800) 808-1991.
- **Equal Exchange** offers fair trade coffee and specialty drinks from the developing world, which can be ordered at <http://www.equalexchange.com/products/products.html>.
- **The Ministry of the Arts**, by the Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange, promotes the unity of creation through art by the sisters. Their online catalogue can be found at <http://www.ministryofthearts.org/>.
- **The United Nations** offers books for children about children around the world at <http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/bookstor/Html/children.htm> and at <http://www.unicef.org/publications/index.html>.

The Women's Bean Project has a delicious assortment of gifts of soups, spreads, and much more. A purchase of these products helps women break the cycle of poverty and unemployment. See: <https://www.womensbeanproject.com>

Christmas Cards:

Consider the following sites for your purchase of Christmas Cards. Purchases support various causes and benefit those in need.

- **Global Justice Cards** are created by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Cards feature texts to raise awareness of justice issues and encourage personal and community action to address them. Find them at: <http://globaljusticecards.com/index.html>
- **Heartbeats**, a religious gifts catalogue of inspirational gifts made by world artists, is a ministry of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary. See <http://www.heartbeatscatalog.org/> or call (800) 808-1991.
- **The Marianists** have cards and gifts that are accompanied by prayer. See their christmas cards, mass cards and calendars at: <http://www.marianistmission.org/>

