

Formation for Mission

ponder anew what the Almighty can do....

December 2011 - Volume 6

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The Ordering of Time

The ordering of time has to do with the whole of our communal life. The Church has a calendar based on a story. Our faith, character, and consciousness are shaped, and community made possible, by the internalizing of that story. It is important that Christ's story, every Christian's story, be seen and lived out in our communal life. But, we compete with other calendars: the secular calendar (Mother's Day, Halloween, Valentine's Day, etc.), the civil calendar (New Year's Day, Independence Day, etc.), and the school calendar. If we are not intentional about ordering time according to our story, other calendars may influence how we live.

Best Practices -

[Consider hosting a Parish Art Event](#)

Many of our memories of worship as a child would include

"Ponder anew what the Almighty can do..."

Advent, the beginning of the church's year, seems to be a good time for us to reflect on God's actions in the world and how we respond to them.

The Baptismal Covenant (BCP pp 304-305) offers us first a statement of belief about God and His actions and secondly questions related to our life of response. This is a good time to reflect on church formation programs - and ask, how are we doing? Are we teaching our beliefs to all the people in our congregations? Are we helping congregants live their faith? Advent would be a time to address these questions, forming a plan of action for the new church year. Advent might also be a time to begin a new formation offering.



An example of such a new offering - Grace & Holy Trinity Cathedral is beginning a Benedictine study group.

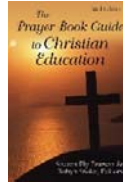
Quoting from a Cathedral publication - "Many of us experience a deep thirst for a meaningful spiritual life. We find ourselves touched by the haunting image in Psalm 42:1-2: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you. O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." We feel the need for genuine spiritual refreshment as we wander through an environment all too often parched and dry. We long for an affirming relationship with God that will make a difference in how we experience daily life. We eagerly set out on the inviting journey of spiritual growth, seeking a deeper relationship with God's very self. We may indeed begin such a journey, doing some reading, joining some worship, trying to live attuned to God's presence. Yet before we are very far along, we discover that we cannot go it alone. We need help, advice and guidance."

the songs, the colors, the appearance of our church surroundings, art on the walls and elsewhere. Many tenets of our faith are abstract, learned symbolically and intuitively. Not only children, all of us find our faith furthered by the arts - music, visual arts, drama, poetry, stories. We would be wise to be more intentional about using the arts in our formation programs. "He (or she) who sings, prays twice" is a quote of St. Augustine of Hippo. It speaks to the participatory nature of the arts - a powerful form of reflection on scripture, on our beliefs, on our faith. Artistic creativity needs to be encouraged in our church life. Advent, Christmas, & Epiphany would be excellent seasons to plan a Parish Art Event. Encourage people to choose a theme and artistically develop that theme. Or as a parish - choose the theme and then suggest parishioners explore that theme in visual art, in music, in poetry, etc. Advent themes that might inspire - Hope; Light breaking through Darkness; Angels; Waiting with Joy!; Renewal. A Christmas themed Art Event might ask parishioners to reflect and create based on the Nativity Story. Finally, Epiphany is rich in biblical stories for artistic reflection - the Baptism of Jesus, Jesus' Disciples, the Miracle at Cana, Healing miracles, etc. It is rich in themes appropriate for an art event - the Manifestation of Christ, Discipleship, Spreading Jesus' light in the world, Baptism.

Let's celebrate our creativity! Celebrate who we are - People of God, created in the Image of God, the Supreme Creator!!

What plans does your church have for the new year? How are you planning to meet the spiritual and formational needs of your congregation?

Christian Formation During Advent -



The Prayer Book Guide to Christian Formation (Third Edition) is a must for your Christian Formation library. It contains sections on the Calendar for the Church Year, on the Revised Common Lectionary, and on Keys to Teaching and Learning.

New insights and ideas to accompany using the prayer book in Christian education, including Advent materials, will continue to be shared through www.prayerbookguide.wordpress.com

Personal Prayer

The cry of Advent, "Wake up! Be alert! Watch for his coming!" is difficult amidst the busyness of the season. We can practice some simple, but not easy, disciplines. Pray the Lord's Prayer with conviction: "your kingdom come, your will be done." Let us ask ourselves what it is that we are waiting for? And, if Jesus revealed God's will and kingdom, how do I witness to that reality? What are your dreams as you contemplate the coming of the fullness of God's reign?

An Outline of the Faith

Commonly called the Catechism, this is an outline of instruction cast in the traditional question and answer form. It is a point of departure for exploring the beliefs and practices of The Episcopal Church. The following areas are especially appropriate to study during this season. It begins on page 845 of the BCP with Human Nature and continues through The Christian Hope. Remembering God promised the Hebrew people that they would be his people and bring all the nations of the world to him. During Advent, we recall the prophets who continually call us back to God. Our response should be to "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8). Are you a social justice Christian?

Reflection on God's action in daily life

The function of Advent is to remind us who God is and who we are meant to be, as well. Advent is about the richness of emptiness. God's coming to the world as an infant, born in a stable, from humble beginnings. In our secular culture, a tone of wanting more, spending



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more, and accumulating riches on earth surround us. Practice some simple, but not easy, disciplines. For instance, fasting from the media - tunes us in to the still small voice of God as does focusing on giving ourselves to God and intentionally spending time apart from the busyness of this season.

Things to Do

Download this [resource list of activities](#), which includes instructions for the below items, and more.

Make an Advent Calendar to mark the days, construct an Advent Wreath and use it weekly or daily with bible readings, plan and keep an Advent discipline, perhaps daily bible reading and reflection with prayer time or create a "Giving Tree" for your family that encourages giving to others (read [The Giving Tree](#) by Shel Silverstein).

Further resources

[Alternatives for Simple Living](#)
[Redefine Christmas](#)
[Simple Living Network](#) newsletter
[Center for a New American Dream](#)
[Buy Nothing Christmas](#)