

Something for everyone. Nourishment for spirits of all ages. Perhaps not the quiet and contemplative Advent event I thought I should offer (and, subsequently, that they should want), but what they actually need, want, and will appreciate.

Building from Disappointment

My predecessor was an artist and incredibly creative. She put together lovely evenings for families with young children on Palm Saturday and Advent. We made Advent wreathes and bracelets with colored beads for the days of Holy Week, we painted palms on sugar cookies with green food coloring for Palm Sunday's coffee hour. We spent time in community with each other and explored our spirituality with our little ones. We loved these events.

So of course when I took over I went forward with these same events, searching out and planning wonderful crafts and activities. But at my second Palm Saturday event, something went horribly awry. Parents sent their kids to my carefully laid out tables to do the activities themselves while they, the parents, stood around drinking Starbucks and chatting. They would not engage. When I gently pushed, they said they were exhausted; they'd been with their kids all day, shopping, getting to and cheering at soccer games and piano recitals, and they were just done.

I was disappointed. How could they not want what I had to offer them? How dare they not want what I wanted them to want? And of course in about three minutes I knew right there was my problem. I am not here to tell my families what to want; I'm here to meet them where they are and find out what they need to grow spiritually.

Children's Advent Workshop

For the last three years, we've offered a children's Advent workshop on the same evening as our Lessons and Carols service. We all join together for a simple supper and fellowship, then parents are free to go to the service while my **wonderful volunteers** and I spend time exploring the season with the children.

St. Nicholas inevitably comes by and leaves candy canes in the children's shoes in the vestibule. We end the evening with a story, hot cocoa, and cookies. Parents return from the service spiritually refreshed and ready to enter some quiet contemplative vespers with their kids. A few parents have even asked me, in hushed whispers, if they might sneak away for a much needed dinner together. This, in the moment, is what will feed them both physically and spiritually.

What's Next?

This year our parish is not doing a Lessons and Carols service for a variety of reasons, but I wanted to move forward with our little Advent event. So the questions once again become, 'Where are they? Where do I need to meet them?'

Well I am the most fortunate Christian educator in the nation because I have Helen Barron of [Candlepress](#) right here. She offers advice, encouragement, support, ideas, and the occasional dust-off when something flops. And our idea for this year's event will NOT flop, because we're offering a trinity of events:

Saturday evening, *parents and children* join us for our **Advent workshop**: take-and-make crafts, ideas, prayer and reflection stations, and baking a gift for our neighbors. Everyone can choose as many or as few stations as they wish; take one of each or take none at all.

Then, with the help and energy of our wonderful youth group, we're offering a **parents' night out**. We will feed the kids, play some games, get them into PJs, and wind down with some favorite Christmas videos and stories. Parents have a free evening out.

Something for Everyone

But wait, there's more! Once parents of younger children have taken their sleepy little ones away, the **youth group** will stay for that **Lock-In** they've been requesting. Their reward for the many services they offer the parish, for their hard work at school and in everything they do, for their commitment to outreach and each other, and for generally being great young people.

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I teach that our communion is sacred, that being in community and relationship with one another is holy. Meeting each other where we are, and finding ways to help each other fill our wells; that's what this ministry is all about.

Thanks be to God.

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