

Christmas Consumers



Dec 2013

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Jesus tells us that we cannot serve two masters, God and money. How did we end up with Christmas becoming so commercialised?

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This Month...

- Su 1 **Advent 1**
Stay Awake
- Fr 6 St Nicholas
- Su 8 **Advent 2**
Repent
- Th 12 Our Lady of
Guadalupe
- Su 15 **Advent 3**
Be Patient
- Sa 21 St Peter Canisius
- Su 22 **Advent 4**
Emmanuel
- Tu 24 **Christmas Eve**
- We 25 **Christmas Day**
- Th 26 **Boxing Day**
St Stephen
- Su 29 **Holy Family**
Homeless..
St Thomas Becket

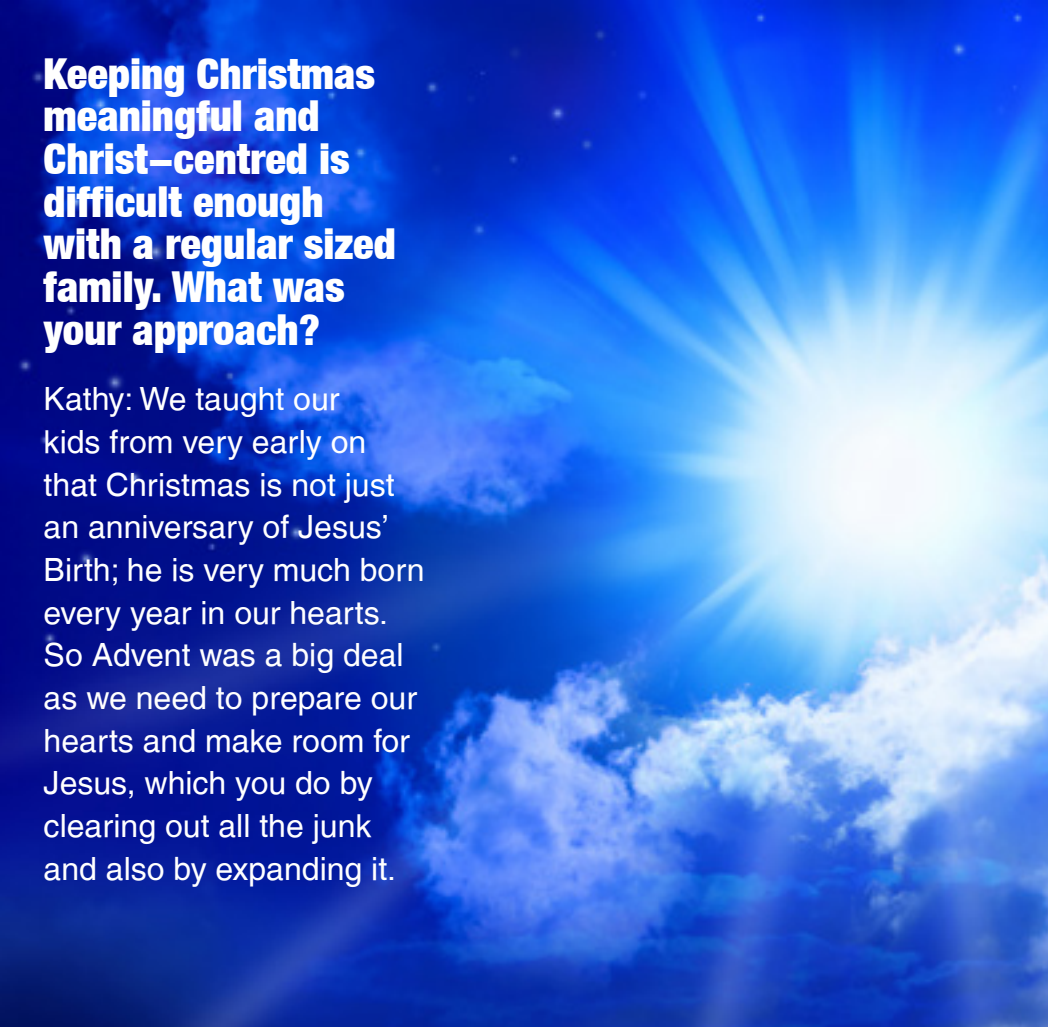
Catholic families the world over have creatively approached their Christmas traditions to help raise their children in the true spirit of the event. CathFamily editor, Kiara Pirola interviewed Ron & Kathy Feher about their experiences.



With ten kids, Christmas must have been a little crazy and stressful. How did you do it?

Kathy: Actually, Christmas was never really that stressful for us. Christmas morning was spent unwrapping presents and relaxing in pyjamas. The first thing we established was extending Christmas celebrations until the Epiphany. This took the pressure off the extended family and off us especially since we did not live in the same state.





Keeping Christmas meaningful and Christ-centred is difficult enough with a regular sized family. What was your approach?

Kathy: We taught our kids from very early on that Christmas is not just an anniversary of Jesus' Birth; he is very much born every year in our hearts. So Advent was a big deal as we need to prepare our hearts and make room for Jesus, which you do by clearing out all the junk and also by expanding it.

We emphasised generosity above all. This then led to our tradition of Advent Angels. Each child would draw a name out of a hat and they would secretly perform random acts of kindness for that sibling. They would do chores for them or leave them bits of candy, little anonymous things throughout Advent.

Ron: The other major Advent project was the Christmas Pageant at our local Parish. All our kids were involved and it culminated in a very special Christmas Eve vigil mass. That was really such a highlight, that Christmas morning opening presents really was a smaller postscript to Christmas Eve.

Ron: One year we wrapped up a box like a present with a slot in the top and throughout Advent, we would all write down on slips of paper acts of kindness that we witnessed and put them in the box. Any nice, affirming or generous act we saw would go in the box as our gift to Jesus. On Christmas morning we opened the box and read them out. The whole idea was to give a real tangible sense of Jesus' presence in each of them and how they were a gift to each other.

As we got to the bottom of the box, the slips of paper suddenly became very focused on our third daughter Deven and it hit us all at once when we read out "Deven resembles a Greek goddess." Our usually sweet, humble Deven had stacked the box herself! Our eldest son Darren spat out his hot chocolate and the rest of us just about died laughing.



Kathy: The daily ritual that anchored all these traditions was the Advent Wreath. Each night at dinnertime before we said grace, we would sing *O Come, Emmanuel*, light the candles and usually read an Advent story from a series of Children's books we had. Even when we tried to introduce some more adult stuff as they got older they wouldn't have any of it!

Ron: Actually that's one of those funny things about Christmas traditions, they are the most sacrosanct of all and heaven forbid that you try and change them!



How did you handle the gift giving?

Kathy: Well we both came from very different formations in our families; Ron's formation was his father hand making all of their toys in the workshop whereas I was thrilled by one spectacular gift from Santa Claus. So we would stuff the kids' stockings with things they needed like socks, candy, school supplies and the like, but Ron and I would set a budget per child and think and pray about a really special gift that they really wanted.



As they got older we began doing a PollyAnna* which is very important now that they are all adults. However, we never wanted to put limits if the kids wanted to be generous because that was what Christmas was always about! So some of the kids would get everyone a present, some would do their PollyAnna according to their means, and the youngest four would always give each other presents. There was never any resentment or pressure about it. It was never a 'competition' in generosity, it was about generosity and gratitude and Jesus.

*Polly Anna, sometimes called Kris Kringle, is the tradition where each person draws a name from the hat and buys a gift only for that person.



Ron: We also decided early on not to give gifts to each other at Christmas because we wanted to model the self-giving generosity and we wanted one less present to stress over! It didn't take long for our kids to notice this fact and they gave us presents.

Kathy: I'll never forget the drama when Deven saved up all her pocket money to buy Ron a treadmill. It wouldn't fit through the front door and the kids had me keeping Ron busy in the garage whilst the older boys wrestled the treadmill somewhere where they could surprise him!

What about Santa Claus?

Kathy: I have a really strong desire not to lie to our children so we weren't going to do the 'presents from' Santa. We did not ever negatively put down the tradition but we approached it from the angle that Jesus uses all kinds of people to show us how generous he is. Sometimes it's Mom and Dad, other times it's St Nicholas and even Santa Claus.

We also really had fun with the St Nicholas tradition and told the stories and the kids would put their shoes out on St Nicholas' Day and have them filled with Candy. It also helped that we didn't have a TV when the kids were little and had strict limits on TV time as they got older so there was minimal exposure to the all the commercials.



And finally, what did your Christmas Day involve?

So we'd bundle the kids into bed late, after the pageant and Mass and then we'd gather all the presents into the den, wrap them and put them under the tree and then get some sleep before the kids would be up at zero dark thirty in their matching pyjamas making Kathy coffee to coax her out of bed. Each child would unwrap their present one at a time. It was really important that the person giving the gift could see their sibling unwrap them and we could all share in the joy. It would also take all day and we'd have a big lazy brunch in our pyjamas and playing with our new presents. The next twelve days were spent relaxing, visiting family and friends and eating.

Ron & Kathy reside in Pennsylvania, USA and are the National directors of **Living in Love**

Being One at Christmas

Francine & Byron Pirola

Christmas and holidays are supposed to be times of joy and peace. Yet often they are stressful and downright painful. Sometimes the event highlights losses in the family, such as a recently deceased family member, or members separated by divorce or conflict. It can be hard in these circumstances to enjoy those who are **present** when our hearts are aching for those who are **absent**.



Yet the reverse can also cause strife: the presence at these events of family members who have hurt us or who behave offensively can steal the joy from our hearts. These are the people we wish were absent rather than present!

Perhaps one of the biggest sources of stress, particularly for newlywed couples, is differences in the traditions of extended family. Most people feel very attached to their childhood memories of Christmas and newlyweds often simply assume that Christmas will continue as usual. They can be quite resistant to any notion of modifying these cherished traditions. Add to the mix the pressure from extended family to conform to their expectations and it's a hotbed of strife!

Our first Christmas was a self-inflicted nightmare! We moved back and forth between both families five times over the 24 hour period. At the end we were wasted. The following year, we were living overseas and delighted in being very deliberate in crafting our own unique Christmas traditions with just the two of us. - Fran



Couple Exercise

Share on the following questions:

1. What is your fondest childhood memory of Christmas and why is it significant to you?
2. What is the most important family tradition you had as a child at Christmas? Why do you value it?
3. What values do you want to see expressed in Christmas this year? (eg love, unity, worship of Jesus, simplicity, low stress, peace, personal growth, social acceptance, justice, awareness of the poor etc)
4. What possible rituals or traditions would honour those values?

Come together and say a short prayer, asking God to open your hearts to his values. Share your answers together and then discuss ways that you can honour both your values. Agree to try one or two ideas and review it before next Christmas.

Advent Wreath

Start out Advent this year with our variety of Advent Wreaths that suit all situations and traditions.



