Advent, Holiday Service Activities and Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching promotes the development and empowerment of every human being as well as the participation of everyone in community building. Pope John Paul II has written about the importance of developing the potential of all individuals; every person, he affirms, is in the process of “becoming,” and our actions should focus on supporting this development through community activities.

When thinking of holiday service activities, brainstorm about possible ways to involve the people you want to reach out to. For example, instead of presenting a holiday concert to a passive audience, have a process, or an evening, in which the group works on songs together. Think of ways to encourage the population you wish to serve to help create at least some gifts for their families. Coupon books are one way to do this, and these can be made by both parents and children. Parents can work on family trees for their children; they can record audio tapes with family history. They can also record a children’s book provided by your service group, so that their children can listen to the story, as well as look at it, when the parent must be away at work, etc. Children can make picture frames and write letters, cards and poems for their parents. They can make cookies and other food items to share with their families, as well as ornaments. Brainstorming with your group should enable you to come up with more ideas that generate active participation and creative energy for everyone involved.

Holiday service activities often include buying and/or making and distributing gifts. In the spirit of Catholic Social Teaching, remember:

1. Be careful that the items you buy are not made from sweat shop labor. See page 2 for more information on corporations that do not promote just labor practices in their own and/or their sub-contractors operations. See page 3 for Fair Trade suggestions for shopping that promotes justice.

2. Try to avoid gift items that demean human dignity in any way, including violent toys and those that encourage consumerism and inappropriate activities for young children. Do give gifts that respect multiculturalism.

3. In the interest of promoting empowerment and human dignity, give gifts that will creatively engage the receiver, such as non-violent games and craft activities, as well as books and items that encourage imaginative play.

4. Again, to promote empowerment and human dignity, try not to undermine parents by giving wrapped gifts to the family directly. Instead, contribute to, or set up, a “gift store” where parents in poverty can select unwrapped toys and gifts for their children at no cost. Help them wrap the items. A similar store can be set up for children so they can select items for their parents.

5. Remember that gifts for teens are needed as much as gifts for younger children.

Education for Justice
Be Aware of Products Made with Sweatshop Labor
When Shopping for Christmas

Many organizations and individuals are working to promote labor rights for people throughout the world. The following is a list of organizations that have targeted information and campaigns against specific companies and their labor abuses. These organizations hope to raise public awareness around the labor practices of these companies and to hold these companies accountable.

National Labor Committee
http://www.nlclnet.org/campaigns/china/
(Learn about the labor abuses of Toys R Us, Disney, Mattel, and Hasbro.)

Sweatshop Watch
http://www.sweatshopwatch.org
(Learn about the labor abuses of Levi.)

The United Food and Commercial Workers
http://www.ufcw.org
(Learn about the labor abuses of Wal-Mart.)

National Labor Committee for Human Rights
http://www.nlclnet.org
(Learn about the labor abuses of Disney.)

UNITE
http://www.uniteunion.org
(Learn about the labor abuses of the Gap.)

Educating for Justice
http://www.nikewages.org
(Learn about the labor abuses of Nike.)

United Students Against Sweatshops
http://www.unionvoice.org/studentsagainstsweat/home.html
(Learn about the labor abuses of Land’s End, Tommy Hilfiger, Fashion Bug, Lane Bryant, Charming Shoppes, Federated Department Stores, Wet Seal.)

Behind the Label
http://www.BehindtheLabel.org
(Learn about the labor abuses of Wal-Mart, Lord & Taylor, The Gap)
Shop Fair Trade Stores and Products

“Fair Trade” is the movement to bring goods from small and medium producers in developing countries directly to markets in North America and Europe, thereby eliminating middlemen and maximizing profits where they are most needed. The idea is to ensure the dignity of workers by paying wages that meet basic needs, regulating work hours, providing a safe work environment, and complying with standard environmental practices. Fair Trade organizations safeguard the dignity of producers by giving them a fair price for their goods, offering financial and technical support, promoting environmental sustainability and cooperating to enhance product quality. The international fair trade movement has seen significant growth in recent years and is now positively impacting trading relationships in the global economy. See links to specific fair trade organizations below.

FAIR TRADE SITES

- **Equal Exchange** ([http://www.equalexchange.com](http://www.equalexchange.com)) offers a complete line of fairly traded, gourmet organic coffees from small-scale farmers in Latin America and Africa.

- **SERRV International** ([http://www.serrv.org](http://www.serrv.org)) markets unique gifts produced by artisans in over 35 developing countries. Their wide range of products includes coffee, candles, baskets, ornaments and jewelry.

- **Ten Thousand Villages** ([http://www.villages.ca](http://www.villages.ca)) is a supplier of exquisite, fairly-traded handicrafts from Third World countries.

- **Khatsa & Co** ([http://www.khatsa.com](http://www.khatsa.com)) features Flavors of Tibet — award-winning Tibetan sauces, condiments, candies and teas.

- **Cadeaux du Monde** ([http://www.cadeauxdumonde.com](http://www.cadeauxdumonde.com)) is a folk art gallery for the discriminating collector featuring an eclectic array of decorative and wearable art and handicrafts from America, the Caribbean and South Pacific.

- **Macrosun Imports** ([http://www.macrosun.com](http://www.macrosun.com)) offers a wide spectrum of unusual jewelry, artwork, crafts, and artifacts direct from socially-responsible South Asian artists.

- **Traditions Fair Trade** ([http://www.traditionsfairtrade.com](http://www.traditionsfairtrade.com)) offers folk art products from cultures all over the world made available through fair and equitable trade relationships with artisan and farmers from more than fifty countries.

- **Global Marketplace** ([http://www.globalmarketcrafts.com](http://www.globalmarketcrafts.com)) helps consumers to find places to purchase Fair Trade crafts, clothing, and jewelry and in doing so help raise the standard of living in developing countries.

Small producers in developing countries will never provide the full range of the goods and services even the most conscious American consumer might require. However, there is a growing network of domestic companies that strive to meet high social and environmental standards in their production processes. The best place to access this network is by looking into Co-op America ([http://www.coopamerica.org](http://www.coopamerica.org)).