

Caring for Creation with a Green Advent and Christmas

Thanks for joining us as we enter the season of Advent and prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of God incarnate. This year we again invite you to come alongside us as we add to our preparations green practices that will allow us to live more gently, gratefully, and sustainably on the earth. What might you do differently this season? We recommend you take a few minutes to read through the list and make a plan. Setting our intentions can help motivate us to follow through with our actions. Commit to starting one new practice each week during the season of Advent, and go from there! We hope this list will serve you well! We welcome your feedback and additional ideas.

*This year we invited creation care advocates from around the diocese to add their voices to how we might further “green” the holidays. Their suggestions have been tagged with the word “**VOICES**.” Many thanks to all who contributed!*

For more information about Honoring and Protecting Creation and the Episcopal Church in Colorado creation care team, visit our web page at <https://episcopalcolorado.org/honoring-and-protecting-creation/>.



Advent

Try a reverse Advent calendar this year. Start with an empty box, and add to it an item for donation each day during Advent. The box could contain non-perishable food items, gently used clothing, or children’s toys.

Or, try a “Pay It Forward” Advent calendar. Examples: Leave money for the next rental in a Redbox slot or parking meter, shovel a neighbor’s driveway. Lots of ideas can be found on [Pinterest](#).

Place change in an Advent Jar each day during Advent, and donate the money to a nonprofit.

VOICES Our Episcopal Church Women’s group is hosting “An Artisanal Advent,” featuring green handmade gifts, including a No-Bake Sale, waxed cotton food wraps, hand-knitted cotton washcloths, handmade paper cards and journals, hand-thrown pottery spoon rests, and cotton quilted items. Our group donates to local nonprofits, a food pantry, and clothing give-away. This is a fundraiser, because we need funds to continue; however, we are embracing a simple approach and not promoting consumerism.

Christmas Cards

If you send Christmas cards, consider plantable cards. When the biodegradable paper is planted in a pot of soil, the seeds will grow and eventually the paper will decompose. (Available on [Etsy](#).)

Other card possibilities? Make your own using the art from cards you received last year.

Remember to avoid cards with glitter (more plastic that can't be recycled).

And you can always email your holiday greetings!



Gifts and Gift Wrapping

Go paperless and use cloth wrappings. Use fabric scraps or old shirts. The wrapping helps with packing gifts for mailing and is completely reusable for years to come.

VOICES Wrap presents in newspapers, pillowcases, re-usable fabric shopping bags, or not at all.

Make your wrapping paper part of your gift. Wrap gifts in 100% recycled Kraft paper, then decorate and write messages on the paper using crayons or colored pencils. You can also stamp the paper using [homemade potato stamps](#) and tempera paint.

Remember to shop locally and consolidate trips.

VOICES Here are some questions I like to ask myself when purchasing a gift:

- How far has this item traveled to get to me?
- What part of the price of this item goes to the person who created it?
- How much packaging is included in this item?
- Are the parts of this item recyclable?

VOICES This is an idea I did last year for my son and his family (2 girls, 9 and 11, and my son and his wife). It can be as green as you want it to be. Mostly, it was a way for me to recycle some things that were around my house. I got a big box and decorated it. In it there were 24 wrapped gifts. They were not labeled with a name. The idea was that the family would open a gift every night after supper or during breakfast on the weekends, and they had to decide who in their family the gift was best suited for. Included were puzzles, books, and games that I already owned. Also included were several dinners in a bag (spaghetti sauce and pasta, pancake mix and homemade jam, curry sauce, chickpeas and instant rice)—a big hit for busy nights. I also bought things from non-profits, like craft kits that the girls could make. The girls loved it and asked if we were going to do it again this year. We are. I have already started finding things around the house: more books, an angel candle snuffer that they are fascinated by, a scrapbooking kit that includes stickers and photos from our trip to Yellowstone last September. It isn't entirely green. But you could include experiences in it too, like a walk in a state park, a photography class at a local school, a baking class with Grandma or Grandpa, a day of service at a local non-profit, whatever might be meaningful to your family.

Rather than giving physical Christmas gifts that need to be wrapped and mailed, consider donating funds in the recipient's name to a cause or charity that they support. Check out [Episcopal Relief and Development's Gift for Life catalog](#).

VOICES I like to give gifts that further the giving, e.g., purchasing farm animals through Episcopal Relief and Development. One year on behalf of my brother-in-law I purchased the gift of a pig for a

family. (Pigs offer families financial security and access to food. Families are trained to raise and sell pigs, which reproduce quickly and are ready for market in just six months.) The family received the actual pig, and I gave my brother a small gift-wrapped pig figure that he keeps on his mantel along with figures of other animals I've given on his behalf.

Give gifts of your time or talent. For example, help an elderly friend or neighbor decorate for the holidays.

VOICES Give the gift of memories. One year I received StoryWorth. Each week they email you a question prompt and you write a few paragraphs in answer to the question. You can also send photos. And the person who gifts it can add questions that they particularly want to know. After a year, they take all of your stories and make them into a book. This is not inexpensive, but to collect the stories from parents and grandparents before they pass away is a nice keepsake and priceless.

Give one of the many amazing books on the environment, the climate, and care of creation. Check out the [Denver Zoo's list of recommended reads](#) or peruse one of [EarthDay.org's many lists](#). The creation care team recommends [Finding the Mother Tree](#) (Suzanne Simard), [Beloved Beasts](#) (Michelle Nijuis), [The Sand County Almanac](#) (Aldo Leopold), and [Rooted and Rising](#), edited by the Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas and the Rev. Leah Shade.

VOICES This year I'm focusing on buying locally made products. Here are some to consider:

- Soups from the Women's Bean Project, <https://www.womensbeanproject.com>
- Spices and rubs from the Flatiron Pepper Co., <https://www.flatironpepper.com>
- Chocolate from Chocolove, <https://www.chocolove.com>

VOICES Here are some eco-friendly and meaningful ways to give to others:

- Have a family drawing and only purchase a gift for one person, leaving the rest of your gift budget to buy gifts for Angel Tree children.
- Have a white elephant gift exchange instead of purchasing gifts (no buying allowed). This usually turns out to be a lot of fun.
- Hold a thrift-shop-gifts-only Christmas gift exchange. Consider setting a price limit.
- Go caroling in neighborhoods that really need extra cheer. Bring boxes of Christmas cookies to give to people who open their doors



Christmas Trees and Decorations

Choosing Your Tree Option 1—Pot Grown Living Christmas Tree: Living trees can be replanted afterwards and are very environmentally friendly. Keep the 12 days of Christmas in mind as this is how long a tree should stay indoors before being placed back outside. (If it starts to wilt, give it some time outdoors.) Replant it in the spring and use again year after year (until it gets too big of course). No place to store your tree? Check

with your city or town about where you might plant it so others can enjoy it.

Choosing Your Tree Option 2—Cut Christmas Tree: A cut tree is ten times less harmful than an artificial tree. Most artificial trees are not recyclable. It helps if you can choose a tree that is sustainably grown. And remember: Never take your tree to the landfill—most towns offer recycling of cut trees.

Friends of the Earth also advises: Real trees may seem an obvious solution, but if you're only using it for one Christmas it can have a big impact when you think about the land used to grow it and the emissions from transport.

Or...you can go without the tree, and decorate a large houseplant instead!

VOICES Last year my family gave up purchasing live trees. We decorated our potted Norfolk pine (house plant) and tacked string around the perimeter (close to the ceiling) of our family room to hang additional ornaments. It was really lovely.

For lighting, when it's time to replace your lights, switch to LED, as they use up to 80% less energy compared to traditional incandescent lights.

Christmas Ornaments: How long has it been since you strung popcorn and cranberries to decorate your tree? Or made dough ornaments? By all means, forego the tinsel and other plastic-based decorations, none of which can be recycled.



Trimming Your Home

Decorate with nature. What might you find in your own backyard? Pine cones and evergreen clippings make beautiful centerpieces and backdrops for nativity scenes.

VOICES Re-use decorations from year-to-year or exchange decorations with friends to have something different. Look for decorations at second-hand stores. They often have an interesting assortment.

Melt down old candles to create new ones. Canning jars make great containers, and wicks are readily available in craft stores.



Meals

Think about what you eat. The meat and dairy industry is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than all the world's planes, trains, cars and boats put together. Why not try something new and have a meat-free Christmas by swapping turkey for a plant-based menu instead? If that's not possible, you could make just small changes to your Christmas dinner menu. Go for a festive spread with mainly plant-based ingredients and try to make sure any meat or dairy products you're keen to have don't come from intensive farms. When it comes to the vegetables, look out for products that have been grown nearby so you can cut down on the emissions from transportation.

VOICES Check out recipes for tasty vegetarian or vegan alternatives. Here are some vegetarian recipes from delish.com and some vegan recipes from thefirstmess.com.

Cut down on food waste. When you're food shopping, try and choose things that are light on packaging, or buy loose items. And if you end up cooking too much, don't just throw away what's left. Transforming leftovers can be a great way to create new meals, save money, and cut waste. Consider sharing leftovers with a neighbor, and don't forget that most items can be frozen as well for future use. Finally, remember to compost plant-based waste.

Make cloth your friend: Cloth napkins are pretty and can be washed again and again.



Clothing

Reuse your Christmas wardrobe. Ask yourself if you really need to purchase new items. And maybe even forgo the “Ugliest Sweater” exchanges, since most of these garments are made with non-recyclable acrylic fibers.

Websites with More Ideas

<https://www.newswise.com/articles/10-steps-to-a-more-sustainable-christmas>

<https://www.activesustainability.com/sustainable-life/sustainable-christmas/>

<https://simplifytheholidays.org/winter-holidays>