

CATHOLIC MOBILIZING NETWORK



# Advent Family Day Workshop

Celebrating Advent in the Year of Mercy

*By Mae Richardson*



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# The Advent of Mercy

An Advent Family Workshop for Parish Communities

## 1 Introduction

According to Mariam-Webster “Advent” is a word that denotes the arrival of a notable person, thing or event. It also marks the start of a new liturgical year in the Roman Catholic Tradition. For centuries the Season of Advent has been a time of preparation, anticipation and waiting for the incarnation of God-made-Man. This intergenerational family workshop is intended to help communities and families journey through the Advent Season with a special emphasis on the call to mercy as embodied by the person of Jesus Christ who we prepare to welcome.

This one to two hour family workshop provides an opportunity for families to gather as part of the parish community to reflect on our call to be people of mercy and to provide families concrete opportunities during the Advent Season to pray for and practice mercy as a family unit.

## 2 Overview

The focus of this gathering is on the family creation of their own Advent Wreath and personalization of weekly prayers. There are also additional activities that should be set up around the perimeter of the room. This will allow families to work at their own pace and any activities not completed during the workshop may be taken home and completed during the Advent Season. This workshop should be held on the week prior to the start of Advent, or on the first weekend of Advent.

### ***Supplies Needed:***

Family Advent Wreath Kits (each family should receive a bag with the following materials upon arrival)

- Oasis or Styrofoam wreath ring
- 4 candle stakes for the wreath
- 3 purple and 1 pink taper candle
- 36 inches of purple satin ribbon
- 50 floral pins

### ***Additional Supplies:***

- Assorted Greenery – clippings from Evergreen trees, holy trees or boxwood are ideal. A box of boxwood trimmings from a floral supply will provide greenery for approx. 60 12” wreaths.
- Clippers – a few pair of handheld clippers will allow families to trim greenery to the lengths needed.
- Print outs of attachments 1 – 5 (one per family)

- Popsicle sticks (small) – 16 per family
- Glue
- Flower cut outs – 25 per family (can be made using shape punch out, post it notes that are shaped like flowers or printed on colored paper for each family to cut out)
- Mason Jars (1 per family)
- Large popsicle sticks (the ones that are like tongue depressors) – colored ones are best – 26 per family
- 2” Wide Ribbon
- 1/2” wide ribbon
- Fine tip Sharpies
- Glue dots

### ***Suggested Schedule***

*(Duration of each component should be adapted based on the timeframe available for your parish):*

0 – 5 min	Family Welcome
6 – 20 min	Catechesis on Advent and the Year of Mercy
21 – 70 min	Family Advent Wreath Making
70 – 90 min	Additional Activities
90 – 100	Conclusion

### ***Set Up:***

Ensure that the room is set up in such a way that each family unit has space to work together on their Advent wreath. In many cases this will mean 1 – 2 families per table.

Additional Activities should be set up around the perimeter of the room in such a way that there is space to work at each station.

Provide one common area for greenery that will be needed for the development of the Advent wreath.

Family units should receive a package of supplies for their advent wreath upon arrival and supplies for additional activities should be set up at that station.

## **3 Family Welcome**

Welcome families to your Advent Family Workshop in these or similar words:

*Mercy is a virtue – a habit that we develop - which influences our compassion for others. Mercy inspires us to strive to ease the challenges that others face, to ensure that systems are just, and to help in those cases where individuals or groups have failed to be treated with dignity and respect. As we prepare for this Advent Season, Pope Francis has called us to start a Year of Mercy. 365 which challenge*

*the Christian faithful to not only pray for mercy, but to find concrete ways to act with Mercy in our communities and our world.*

*However, this call to mercy must not be merely about gestures or obligations. To transform the world into a place that is truly just, and truly represents the Kingdom of God which we are called to bring about, these actions must be acts of love for our neighbor as a response to our deep love for God.*

*Today we gather as a parish, and as family units, to consider how we can be agents of Mercy, and to find concrete ways we can act in imitation of Jesus Christ in our world.*

## **4 Catechesis on Advent and the Year of Mercy**

Spend approximately 20 minutes with your families learning more about Advent and the Year of Mercy. This should not be solely presentation, but can include dialogue with the families and time for them to talk with each other as well. This section may be shortened based on the time available.

Ask your families to share with you what Advent is, including anything that is special about Advent (traditions, practices, meaning of the season). After a few shared answers present the following information in these or similar words:

*Today, the Advent season lasts for four Sundays leading up to Christmas. At that time, the new Christian year begins with the twelve-day celebration of Christmastide, which lasts from Christmas Eve until Epiphany on January 6.*

*Advent symbolizes the conviction and hope which the Church has for what is called the “last days.” That does not mean we think the world is going to end this season, but that we believe that the world Christ preached about, a world of love and compassion, a world where justice and mercy and reparation are realized will one day come about. As a Church we continue to believe that at some point in the future creation will be restored as God intended it to be. But until that time, we wait for the return of Christ*

*The church is in a similar situation to Israel at the end of the Old Testament: we wait in hopeful and prayerful expectation for the coming of the Messiah. Israel was able to look back on their past and at God’s gracious actions towards them and they were able to have faith that God would once again act on their behalf. In the same way, the church, during Advent, looks back upon Christ’s coming in celebration while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation to the coming of Christ’s kingdom when he returns for his people.*

*Advent is about preparing to commemorate the birth of Christ which happened over 2000 years ago in Jerusalem, but also about preparing our hearts and the*

*world for the coming of Christ again at some point in the future. It is about the “both-and” or the “what was-what is-and what is to come.”*

*But it is not just about praying for these things, and hoping for these things. It is about realizing our own role in helping bring about the type of world God would want. This is part of what Pope Francis talks about in calling for a Year of Mercy.*

*I have asked the Church in this Jubilee Year to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us.*

*The corporal and spiritual works of mercy work together to give Christians concrete ways to live according to Jesus’ Great Commandment. The corporal works of mercy focus on the physical or bodily needs that we all have as humans, while the spiritual works of mercy focus on the spiritual needs that humans long to have fulfilled. The corporal works of mercy are:*

- *To feed the hungry.*
- *To give drink to the thirsty.*
- *To clothe the naked.*
- *To Shelter the Homeless*
- *To visit the sick.*
- *To visit the imprisoned*
- *To bury the dead.*

*The Spiritual works of mercy are:*

- *To instruct the ignorant.*
- *To counsel the doubtful.*
- *To admonish sinners.*
- *To bear wrongs patiently.*
- *To forgive offences willingly.*
- *To comfort the afflicted.*
- *To pray for the living and the dead*

*Today we would like to take some time as families to find ways to be more attentive to our Advent journey of making the world more Christ like, and to the call to act with mercy and love. Each family will make their own advent wreath and help personalize weekly prayers for the lighting of the Advent wreath at home each Sunday. There are also additional activities that you can do, either once your family is done making their wreath, or simultaneously as other members are working on the family wreath.*

## 5 Advent Wreath Making and Family Prayers

The making of the Advent Wreath is a time honored tradition within the Catholic Church, and as we start the year of Mercy a fitting way to call our attention to the needs of the world and our responsibility. However many families, while they somewhat know what an Advent Wreath is, they have not necessarily had one in their homes. This part of the workshop allows the family unity to work together to make a wreath. Additionally the family is provided prayers to use at home to bless the wreath, as well as for each week when lighting the candles.

*See attachment #1 for instructions for families*

## 6 Additional Activities

### 1) Corporal Works of Mercy Coloring Book

This activity is intended for those in preschool – early elementary. Print out the mini coloring book pages and have families fold them along the lines to create a coloring book for each young child. This coloring book can be used by families at home during lent to help their youngest children learn the Corporal Works of Mercy

*See attachment #2 for instructions for families*

### 2) Blessing Bags

The basic idea behind a blessing bag is that you fill a large freezer bag with items that would be useful to those who are homeless in your area. This additional activity is one that should encourage families to take home and do throughout the Advent Season.

You could also buy supplies to have each family make 1 blessing bag while at the workshop and deliver those to a shelter after the Advent Workshop.

*See attachment #3 for instructions for families*

### 3) A Flowering Crèche

Sometimes a visual aid is very helpful in conveying the realities of our faith. During the Advent Season we frequently talk about the gift of the baby Jesus in the Manger, so why not use that same image to show how the gifts of Jesus were not only his very presence, but also the things he teaches us to do.

*See attachment #4 for instructions for families*

#### 4) An Advent Jar

What's an Advent Jar you ask? Well, it's just like an advent calendar, except you use a jar and Popsicle sticks. This is a creative and fun way to incorporate prayer, scripture, service and family time into your Advent journey as a family.

*See attachment #5 for instructions for families*

## 7 Conclusion

Approximately ten minutes prior to your end time, call families back together. Thank them for attending, remind every family that if they did not get to an additional activity they may take instructions and supplies before leaving. Close with the following prayer which is adapted from *Misericordiae Vultus*, the papal bull of induction proclaiming the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy

*Loving God-*

*Help us live out in our daily lives the mercy which you constantly extend to all of us.*

*As you cast open the doors of your heart to us may we respond with urgency to proclaim your mercy to others.*

*May we always be credible witnesses to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

*May we never tire of extending mercy, and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort.*

*May we become the voice of every man and woman, and repeat confidently without end:*

*“Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old” (Ps 25:6).*

*Amen.*

# Blessing of the Advent Wreath

*Use this blessing on the First Sunday of Advent prior to lighting the First Candle*

The use of the **Advent Wreath** is a traditional practice which has found its place in the Church as well as in the home. The blessing of an Advent Wreath takes place on the First Sunday of Advent or on the evening (Saturday) before the First Sunday of Advent.

When the blessing of the Advent Wreath is celebrated in the home, it is appropriate that it be blessed by a parent or another member of the family.

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All make the sign of the cross as the leader says: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

**Response (R/.)** Who made heaven and earth.

Then the Scripture, **Isaiah 9:** (lines 1-2 and 5-6) or **Isaiah 63** (lines 16-17 & 19) or **Isaiah 64** (lines 2-7) is read:

**Reader:** The Word of the Lord.

**R/.** Thanks be to God.

With hands joined, the leader says:

Lord our God,  
we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ:  
he is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples,  
he is the wisdom that teaches and guides us,  
he is the Savior of every nation.  
Lord God,  
let your blessing come upon us  
as we light the candles of this wreath.  
May the wreath and its light  
be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.  
May he come quickly and not delay.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
**R/.** Amen.

The blessing may conclude with a verse from

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel":

O come, desire of nations, bind  
in one the hearts of humankind;  
bid ev'ry sad division cease  
and be thyself our Prince of peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

—From "**Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers**"



# Lighting of the Advent Candles

Use these prayers on Sunday of each week as you light the Advent Candle

## First Week

All-powerful God, increase our strength of will for doing good that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, forever and ever.

~AMEN.

## Second Week

God of power and mercy open our hearts in welcome. Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy so that we may share his wisdom and become one with him when he comes in glory, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

~AMEN.

## Third Week

Lord God, may we, your people, who look forward to the birthday of Christ experience the joy of salvation and celebrate that feast with love and thanksgiving. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

~AMEN.

## Fourth Week

Father, all-powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. Lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the voice which announces his glory and open our minds to receive the Spirit who prepares us for his coming. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

~AMEN.

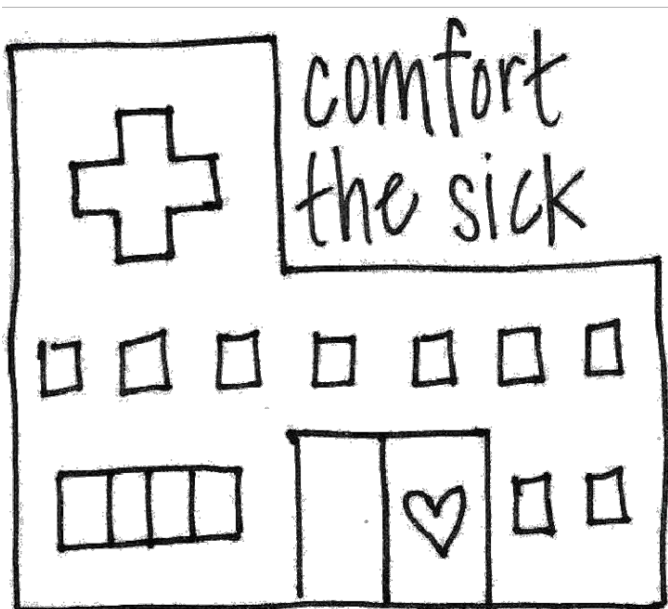
Excerpted from [\*A Prayer Book of Catholic Devotions\*](#)



“Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” ~Matthew 25:31-46

# The Corporal Works of Mercy

Name \_\_\_\_\_



“The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’”



“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink;”



“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.”



“Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’”



“I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”



“Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’”

# Blessing Bags

Blessing Bags are a great way for families to help those in need. Once you create the blessing bags, it is also a great way to be attentive to looking for those in need. Unfortunately, often in our busy schedule it can be easy not to truly see those around us. Consider placing these blessing bags in your car throughout Advent and giving them out as you drive to school, sports events, etc. Any blessing bags that are left on Christmas morning could be put in a box and delivered to a shelter, or you could continue to give them out throughout the Christmas season.

It may be easiest to make your bags in increments of 10 so you can buy things in groups of 10. For instance, a 10 pack of socks, a 10 pack of peanut butter crackers, etc.

## **Here are some things you can put in a blessing bag:**

- Hotel soap, shampoo, etc
- toothbrush
- toothpaste
- fingernail clippers
- hand sanitizer
- socks
- cheese crackers
- apple sauce and plastic spoon
- hard candies
- matches
- a holy card or note
- brush or comb
- McDonald's gift cards
- hand warmers
- gloves
- winter hat or baseball cap (you know your region/season)
- sunblock
- chapstick
- juice boxes
- beef jerky

# A Flowering Crèche

Sometimes a visual aid is very helpful in conveying the realities of our faith. During the Advent Season we frequently talk about the gift of the baby Jesus in the Manger, so why not use that same image to show how the gifts of Jesus were not only his very presence, but also the things he teaches us to do.

For this craft you will need:

- 16 popsicle sticks
- Glue
- 25 flower cut outs (these can be made using a flower shaped punch out, flower post it notes from a supply store (like staples) or you can print flower shapes on colored pieces of paper for the families to cut out at home.

## To make the crèche:

Make 2 “X” to serve as the base of the crèche. Take two of the popsicle sticks and break them in half. Lay 4 popsicle sticks side by side, and using two of the half sticks, glue them to the 4 to hold them all together. Repeat again for the other side of the crèche. Using glue, make the inside of the crèche by gluing the two rectangle pieces you have to the X’s. The finished product will look like the image below.



The idea is to fill the crèche with colorful flowers representing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy that we do as a family throughout Advent. Everyone writes their

offerings on the flowers places them inside the crèche once they are completed. Sometimes blank flowers are added if a person wishes to keep their work. is what our cross looks like now.

It may help to have the list of the Corporal and Spiritual Works of mercy to help remind us of things we could do to help others:

*The corporal works of mercy are:*

- *To feed the hungry.*
- *To give drink to the thirsty.*
- *To clothe the naked.*
- *To Shelter the Homeless*
- *To visit the sick.*
- *To visit the imprisoned*
- *To bury the dead.*

*The Spiritual works of mercy are:*

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- *To pray for the living and the dead*

# An Advent Jar

What's an Advent Jar you ask? Well, it's just like an advent calendar, except you use a jar and Popsicle sticks. This is a creative and fun way to incorporate prayer, scripture, service and family time into your Advent journey as a family.



For this project you will need:

- Mason Jar
- 26 Large popsicle sticks (the ones that are like tongue depressors) – colored ones are best
- 2" Wide Ribbon
- 1/2" wide ribbon
- Fine tip Sharpies
- Glue dots

Starting with a clean, empty mason jar, cut the wide ribbon long enough to wrap completely around the jar with a bit extra on the ends to fold over. Fold over one end of the wide ribbon about an 1/8 of an inch. Using glue dots or double sided tape, adhere the large ribbon to the jar.

Cut the 1/2" ribbon long enough to wrap around the jar with enough extra to make a bow. Place the smaller ribbon so it lays over the wider ribbon and tie it around the jar using a bow to secure it.

Once the jar and ribbon is done, it is time to make your advent jar popsicle sticks. Using a fine tip sharpie families should select 26 things – either from the list below, or they can make their own – that they can do throughout Advent. Write one thing on each stick and place it in the jar.

Each morning, take 2 seconds before running out the door to grab a stick and make that your goal for the day. Or if your family gathers for dinner take the stick out before dinner and talk over dinner about doing that item for the day. If you draw one that you can not do that day, simply place it back and draw another.

1. Say a prayer for someone who is sick or lonely
2. Drive around the neighborhood to look at Christmas Lights
3. Go out to the town's annual tree lighting
4. Go to Church this Sunday as a family
5. Do something nice for some who you may not always like

6. Bake Christmas Cookies and listen to Christmas music
  7. Read a favorite Christmas story together as a family
  8. Decorate the Christmas tree as a family
  9. Baking cookies for Santa – make extra to give to neighbors or those who are homeless
  10. Read the Nativity story – Luke 2:1-14
  11. Send a letter to a family member that lives far away
  12. Set up the Nativity
  13. Pray Psalm 25 together as a family
  14. Write a note to a family member telling them one thing you are thankful for – about them!
  15. Offer to help with a chore that is not normally “yours”
  16. Make a Christmas Card for your favorite teacher and give it to them
  17. Say a prayer at dinner for all those who are hungry
  18. Do a kind act for a neighbor
  19. Read the story of St. Nicholas whose Feast Day is celebrated during Advent
  20. Make 5 Christmas cards and deliver to a hospital or nursing home
  21. Make hot chocolate and watch a Christmas movie as a family
  22. Pray the joyful mysteries of the Rosary as a family – dedicate your prayers to those who go without
  23. Collect change for 5 days – the entire family collects all their extra change each day – donate what you collected to an organization that helps those who are sick.
  24. Pray for those who do not have families during this holiday season
  25. Wrap presents for friends and family
  26. Come up with your own ideas \_\_\_\_\_
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