

## *Peace in the Family*

During this season of Advent, we often encounter the phrase which echoes the song of the angels at the birth of Jesus—"Peace on Earth." Yet we live in a world that struggles for peace. We live in a world that does not really know how to find peace. We live in a world where the acquisition of peace is often viewed as someone else's responsibility. We live in a world where terrorism, mistrust, hatred, and violence have become common elements of society. So, where is peace?

Where do we begin to build an atmosphere of peace? We are all familiar with the saying, "Charity begins at home" but how can we build an atmosphere of peace when our families experience poverty, brokenness and lack of ideals?

*The answers can be found in the story of Christmas itself.* Jesus was born into a poor family. While the material poverty is seen in the fact that He had no place other than a manger to lay His head, He came into a world of political and social unrest where faith and moral values were often in question. The peace Jesus experienced most in the days following His birth came from those who loved, cared for and nurtured Him most—His family.

How, then can you encourage your children to be peacemakers at home? How can we, as adults, move together through lives punctuated with separation and hurt, with sorrow and heart-ache, to find the peace of Christ? We don't really have all the answers to this. The real depth of Christ's peace is only what we will discover as we work together to figure out what it means to be faithful to God in this time and place.

As parents and guardians, you can guide your children in their pursuit of peace. You can model for them peace as you move through the hectic pace of these pre-Christmas days. You can provide opportunities for your children to become "peacemakers."

One of the biggest "peace-breakers" evident at this time of year is the list of items "wanted" for Christmas. Parents often struggle to grant their children's wishes at the cost of much stress and anxiety. When I see this happening, I think of my brother and sister-in-law whose children grew up with the understanding that Christmas was Jesus' birthday and that since Jesus received three gifts for His birthday, they were permitted to ask for three things. What a beautiful way to de-emphasize the commercialism we experience at this time of year and to re-emphasize the real focus of Christmas as the celebration of Jesus' birth.

Take some time during this Advent and Christmas season to spend quality time with your family. Try some of the following:

- Adopt the practice of saying something kind to each member of your family each day.
- Take time to reflect on the toys/games/videos being asked for as Christmas gifts. Discuss the violent/nonviolent aspects of each.
- As a family, place a different figure in the stable each day leading up to Christmas. Say a prayer together as a family as each piece is put in place.
- Tell your children that, they need to be like Jesus and bring peace to a troubled world. Each time one of the children is “caught being a peacemaker” place a sticker on a calendar placed on the refrigerator door. This can extend into the New Year and the celebration of Epiphany.
- Celebrate the feast of the Holy Family with your family. This important feast often receives little attention since it falls during the Christmas holidays. Spend some time focusing on this celebration:
  - Attend church as a family.
  - Do something special during the day as a family.
  - Have a special family meal on that day.

As we once again celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, it is important that we remember that while the child Jesus lying in the manger is the focus of the Nativity scene, the scene is not complete without Mary and Joseph who made the family complete. It is so important that we instill in our children those values which can bring peace into their families and, in turn, bring peace to a broken world.

*Sr. Edward William Quinn, IHM*  
*Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction*  
*Office of Catholic Education*  
*Philadelphia PA*