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Peace in the Family – December, 2007

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. Many of the children who sit in our classrooms come from homes where poverty is evident. Where there is poverty, there is little peace. Poverty can take many forms and is not limited to lack of material goods. In the homes of many of our students, the biggest form of poverty stems from the brokenness and lack of ideals which are so evident in today’s society. At His birth, Jesus came into such a world. 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 we encourage our students to find peace in their homes? As our students move together through lives punctuated with separation and hurt, with sorrow and heart-ache, where can they 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 they will discover as they work together to figure out what it means to be faithful to God in this time and place.


As educators, we can guide them in their pursuit of peace. We can model peace for them in the extended family of their classroom. We can provide opportunities for the students to become “peacemakers.” Hopefully, the students will translate what they learn into their home lives. Following are several activities you can do with students in preparation for the holidays:

- Have a “*Kindness Campaign.*” Encourage students to adopt the practice of saying something kind to each member of their family each day.
- 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. Remind the students that Christmas is Jesus’ birthday (not theirs) and that He received just three gifts (ones with meaning)—should they be asking for more?
- Take time to reflect on the toys/games/videos being asked for as Christmas gifts. Discuss the violent/nonviolent aspects of each. Tap students’ creativity by asking them to re-design the item to make it more an instrument of peace than of violence.
- Review and use some of the activities and resources found on:
http://www.peacegames.org/Resources_what_are_coop_games.shtml
- On a world map, identify the countries where people are struggling to find peace. Mention these countries by name in each day’s prayer for peace.
- Decorate a bulletin board with an empty stable. Tell the students that, they need to be like Jesus and bring peace to a troubled world. Each time someone in the class is “caught being a peacemaker” place an object/figure on the bulletin board to complete the scene. This can extend into the New Year and the celebration of Epiphany.
- Encourage the students to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family with their families. This important feast often receives little attention since it falls during the Christmas holidays. Spend some time focusing on this celebration and suggest to the students that they:
 - 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. As educators, it is so important that we instill in our students those values which can bring peace to their families and, in turn, peace to a broken world.

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