



Christ Church of Atlanta
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Newsletter – December 2011 – Jan Robinson

Getting vs. Giving

Catalogs. And more catalogs. And still more catalogs.

Our mailboxes are stuffed with Christmas catalogs—even as early as mid-October! The glossy pages are filled with the “perfect” gifts to buy for your family members, special friends, neighbors and business associates—food, clothes, plants, toys, specialty items, jewelry. You name it, and there’s a catalog that sells it.

Early in December many years ago, a teacher gave my son’s class an assignment: Look through a toy catalog and pick out the things you want for Christmas. Make a list along with the price of each item and then add up the cost. This was intended as a math lesson, but I cringed as I looked at the overly-commercialized toys that were on my son’s list.

“What do you want for Christmas?” is an oft-heard question in December, asked by the jolly old man in the red suit at the mall, by family members and by friends. Certainly, commercials and elaborate store displays—and catalogs—encourage dwelling on ourselves, trying to convince us of things that we “need.” Christmas is the season for receiving AND giving gifts. But the most preoccupying question for children seems to be “What do I want to get?” and not “What do I want to give?”

A catalog of a different sort was sent in the mail recently and received by the Oliver family. Put out by Samaritan’s Purse (the same organization that oversees Operation Christmas Child), the catalog offers “45 gifts of hope for a hurting world.” Caroline Oliver, one of the children in our elementary Sunday School class, leafed through the catalog and was moved by what was offered in its pages. No toys, no technological gadgets, no latest fashions, no frivolous doo-dads. Instead, the catalog listed numerous ways to make a profound difference in the lives of people who were hurting or in extreme need around the globe. Some of the items cost as little as \$5!

That next Sunday, Caroline brought the catalog to church and asked if she could invite others in her Sunday School class to help raise money to buy some of these gifts. Caroline presented a list to the class of several reasonably-priced possibilities from the catalog and also a list of ways to earn extra money to help pay for the catalog items. The class identified some potential gifts: providing a needy child with milk for a week (\$5); nets to go over beds to protect children from mosquito bites that spread malaria (\$15); a week’s worth of hot meals for a child (\$7); and providing a week of food for a hungry baby (\$9).

Caroline’s list of ways to earn money included: do extra chores, rake leaves for neighbors, have a lemonade stand/bake sale. Every Sunday through Christmas, the students will bring money they have earned to add to the total. Stay tuned for what the class is able to buy!



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You, too, can give something that makes a profound difference in the lives of people. Though gift-giving at Christmas is often in the form of money or tangible objects, there are a multitude of gifts you can give that do not cost anything. Consider the ways you can give to a family member, a friend, a neighbor, an acquaintance, even a stranger: a warm smile; a heartfelt welcome; saying a kind word or giving an appropriate compliment; being gentle in how you treat others; small gestures of care or concern that can lift someone's mood and brighten someone's day; just being there for someone who is going through a difficult time; listening with compassion; a loving glance; a note of thanks to someone who has been a big influence in your life; a note of cheer to someone who is sick; a word of encouragement to someone who is dejected, lonely or afraid.

Instead of contemplating what you hope to get this Christmas, be on the lookout to find ways to give, and you may find that the words of Jesus are true: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

- Jan Robinson, Director of Children's Ministries