Little Box of Good News™

Faith Formation for *Families*

Parish Activities:

Advent

Little Box of Good News | Cajita de Buenas Nuevas

Today is a good day!

You have chosen to equip your families with fun faith formation that they can do *together.*

We recognize that there are not specific seasonal activities in the Little Box of Good News® and, therefore, we are providing this supplement to your parish for use during Advent and Christmas.

You will find ideas for seasonal lesson plans, activities to send home with families, and intergenerational activities. We hope that you are able to use these resources in your parish in whatever way they fit!

This guide pulls resources from several of the boxes. If you don't have all of the boxes yet, you can also easily do the activities without the box materials.

If you are not on a schedule to receive the boxes, please contact us to help you get started - the holidays are a perfect time to begin!! littleboxofgoodnews@edola.org

The Little Box of Good News® is a family-centered faith formation program created by the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana. One goal is to assist parishes with bringing the Good News into homes and equipping parents and caregivers, who are the primary faith-builders in the family. Together, we are helping the next generation realize and embrace their identity as beloved children of God!

Links to the website, Little Podcast of Good News, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, can all be found on our linktree: https://linktr.ee/LittleBoxofGoodNews

Lesson plan format for Advent

Please adapt this and use it as it works best for your parish!
You can stretch/shrink any piece to fit your time frame. As written, it should take about 20 minutes.
Suggested supplies are italicized in red.

Structure of Lessons:

Opening Song	All songs can be found: on the activity page of the LittleBoxofGoodNews.com website, on our YouTube channel (@LittleBoxofGoodNews) and in your booklet (pages 39-40). Follow this QR code for quick access to the YouTube playlist.
Lesson	Follow the instructions on the following pages.
Activity	Follow the instructions on the following pages.
Go Deeper	These directions allow for further exploration or lengthening of the lesson.
Closing Prayer	Use the Family Prayer tear pad from the Prayer Box to create a prayer together. Have a child read it as the closing prayer. (If you run out of pages, you can print more from the Prayer Box Activity Page on the website.)

Advent Week 1 **Happy New Year!**

Opening Song Choose a song from the Little Box of Good News YouTube channel:

Lesson Using a liturgical calendar (an option is found in both the Life Box and in the Prayer Box Parish lesson plans), explain to the children that Advent starts a new year for us in the church!
Because of this, we start at the beginning of the story, by preparing for Jesus' birth.

Activity

Ask: *What do you do to celebrate New Year's?* (allow for answers)
Say: *We are going to celebrate our church new year today. Just like on January 1, we can have a celebration and make noise! As I read this story, I want you to listen for the word "good." Whenever you hear it, we are going to cheer and celebrate!*
Use classroom musical instruments, confetti from the Joy Box, or just use their own voices and bodies to make noise.

> **Optional Craft:** Have the children make and use musical instruments: Tambourine: *paper plates stapled together with beans or beads inside*, Kazoo: *wax paper* fastened around the end of a *toilet paper roll* with a *rubber band*, cut a small hole in the side of the toilet paper roll.

Using *any children's Bible*, read the story of creation, pause after the word "good" and encourage the kids to celebrate.
Say: *What do you think God thinks of creation - even from the beginning? Yes! God thinks that it is good! God thinks that we are good! And that is something to celebrate!!*

Go Deeper Start a Jesse Tree. You can do this either as a class, community, or in individual families. On the following page is one suggested Jesse Tree plan that is aligned with the *Just Love Story Bible*. In addition to the instructions page, each tree will need to make four copies of the *circle ornaments*. If completing as a class, do the week's ornaments all at once on Sunday (or choose a few stories to do).

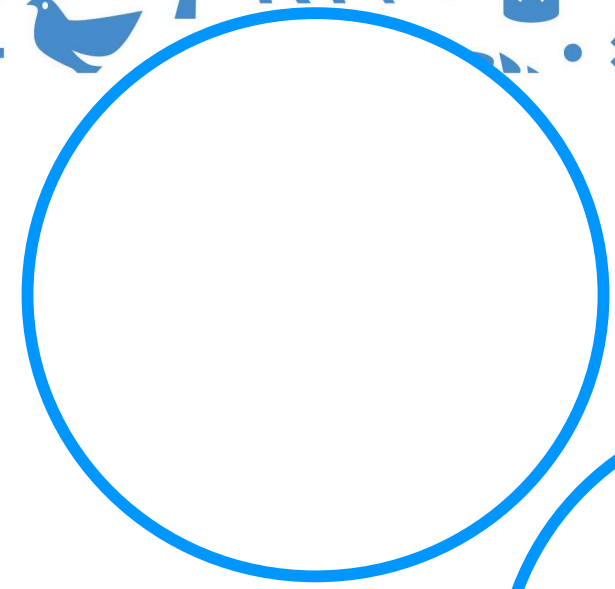
Closing Prayer Use the Family Prayer tear pad from the Prayer Box to create a prayer together. Have a child read it as the closing prayer.

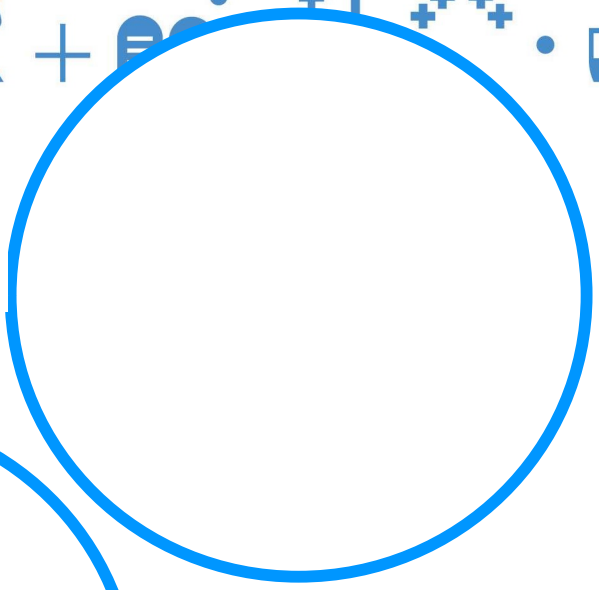
Jesse Tree

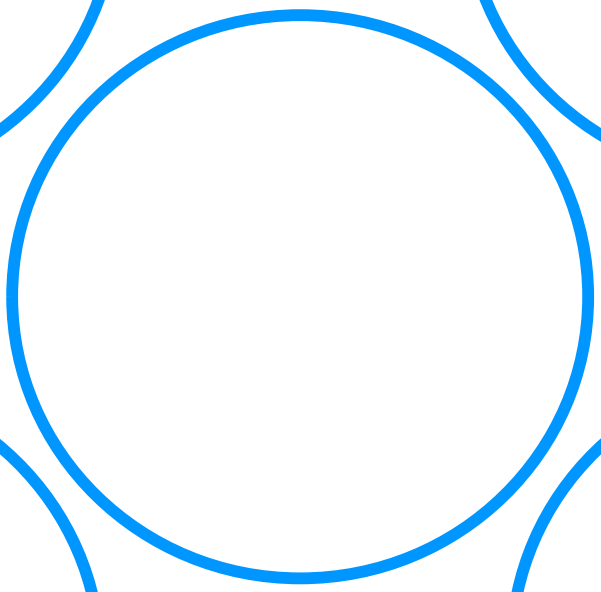
A Jesse Tree is a tradition that helps us remember during Advent.
We tell stories of how God has cared for God's people since the very beginning.
If you have the *Just Love Story Bible*, you can use this guide to tell stories each day.
To make your own Jesse Tree, simply find a *branch*, *small tree* or even a *picture of a tree*.
On each day, draw and color the symbol listed on an ornament for your tree.
When you see the symbol, you can remember the story about God's love!

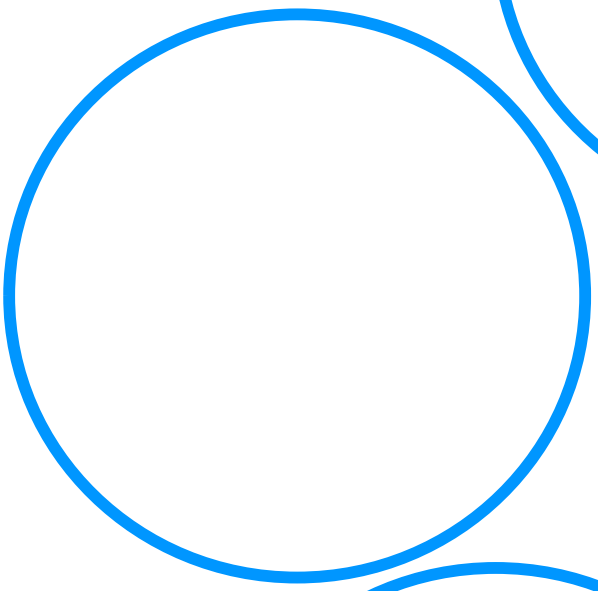
Day	Story	Pages	Ornament Symbol
Dec 1	Creation	20-25	Earth
Dec 2	God's Promise to Abraham	27-28	Tent and starry sky
Dec 3	Joseph	30-34	Multi-colored coat
Dec 4	Moses' birth	45-51	Baby basket in river
Dec 5	God using Moses to free Israelites from Egypt	53-60	Burning bush
Dec 6	God providing manna in dessert	62-65	Manna (bread)
Dec 7	Ten Commandments	71-75	Tablets
Dec 8	Entering the promised land	84-87	River
Dec 9	Ruth	92-95	Wheat
Dec 10	Jesse	96	Stump with branch
Dec 11	David	96-99	Harp
Dec 12	Solomon's Temple	101-102	Temple
Dec 13	Elisha	104-107	Jar of oil
Dec 14	Esther	108-111	Crown
Dec 15	Isaiah's prophecy	129-131	Wolf and lamb
Dec 16	Jeremiah	132-135	Megaphone
Dec 17	Micah	136-139	Holding hands
Dec 18	Jonah	141-142	Great fish
Dec 19	Elijah	159-161	Candle
Dec 20	Elizabeth & Mary	163-167	Musical note
Dec 21	Mary & Joseph traveling to Bethlehem	169	Donkey
Dec 22	Jesus' birth	170	Baby Jesus
Dec 23	Shepherds	172-173	Angels in sky
Dec 24	Magi	175-177	Gifts
Dec 25	The rest of the story	180-181	Heart

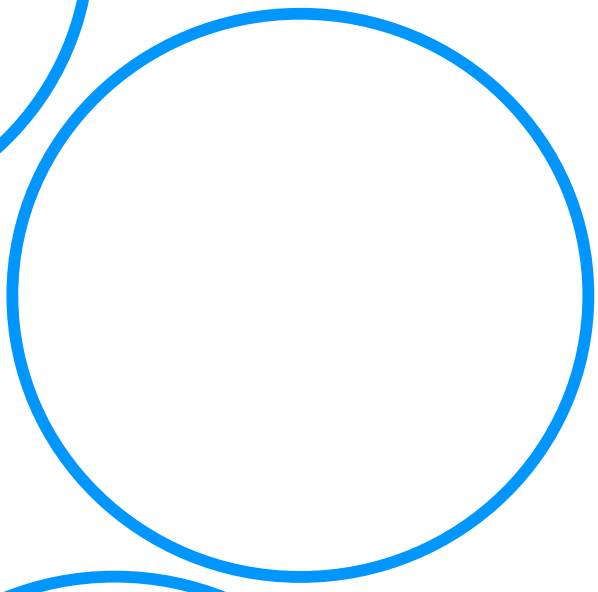
Jesse Tree Ornaments

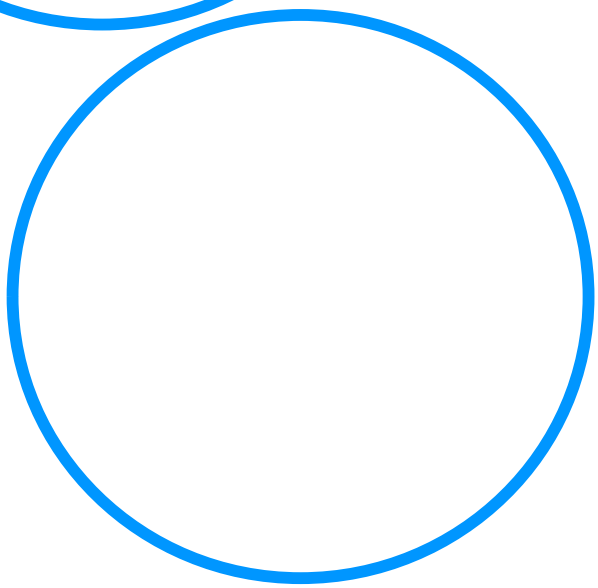


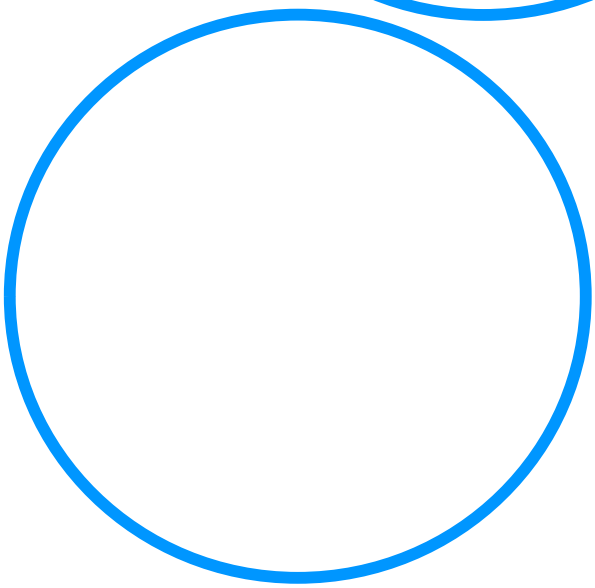












Make four copies.
Cut out each ornament.
Draw suggested symbol on each one.
Punch hole in the top.
Hang directly on tree branch or use ribbon.

Advent Week 2 St. Nicholas Day

Opening Song Choose a song from the Little Box of Good News YouTube channel:

Lesson Explain: *A long time ago, after Jesus but before any of us were born, there was a man named Nicholas. He lived in a small town that had many people who were poor. Nicholas' family had a lot of money. He wanted to use it to help others, but he knew that many of the townspeople were too proud to take his money.*
There were three sisters who lived with their father but did not have much money. Their father did not know what he was going to do. Nicholas heard him praying and knew that he could help!
At the end of the evening, the sisters would wash their stockings (long socks) and hang them up by the fire to dry. This was a long time ago, so there were often open windows. While the family was sleeping, Nicholas would toss gold coins into the stockings for the girls to find in the morning!
He continued this for many days and saved the girls and their father through his generosity and kindness.
When he was still a young man, everyone knew that Nicholas was wise and generous and he became a bishop. It is said that even today, if you leave your shoe or stocking out for him on his feast day (or near to it), you might find some gold coins!

Activity Preparation: Purchase *chocolate "gold" coins*, enough to share with all of the children.
Say: *I think that we are close enough to St. Nicholas Day (December 6), that we can try to leave our shoes out for him!*
Have each child remove one shoe and leave it in the hall outside of the children's church room. Tell them that they should come check their shoes on the way to Coffee Hour.
Bring the children back to church with only one shoe. (It will cause great giggles and memories!)

IMPORTANT: One of the adults should secretly fill the shoes with the gold coins once the children return to the church! (If some children did not want to remove a shoe, leave some extra for them.)

Go Deeper Invite the children to think about ways they can give to the poor in their town.

Closing Prayer Use the Family Prayer tear pad from the Prayer Box to create a prayer together. Have a child read it as the closing prayer.

Advent Week 3 Sharing Joy

Opening Song Choose a song from the Little Box of Good News YouTube channel:

Lesson Some Episcopal churches use a special color for this Sunday. If your church uses rose vestments, you can ask: *Did anyone notice what color the vestments and altar are today?*
Yes! They are pink or rose colored. This symbolizes joy.
If your church does not use rose, ask: *Do you know what the third week of Advent celebrates? Joy!*
Option: Read page 20 in the Joy Booklet.
Ask: *What brings you joy? How can you share joy?*
Allow for answers and discussion.

Activity Have the kids create something to share with others in the congregation. This can be as simple as letting them design cards using whatever supplies you have on hand (*colored paper, crayons, markers, glitter, ribbon, etc.*) or you can choose the option below or teach the children to make your own favorite holiday craft to give away!

Holiday Craft Idea:

Pomanders – an old Christmas tradition made from oranges and cloves to help keep the season and remember the gift of joy from those you love!

Supplies: *oranges, whole cloves, ribbon, toothpicks*

1. If you opt for a ribbon:
    a. Begin with the ribbon and the orange. Wrap the ribbon completed around the orange once and twist. (It might be helpful to use a toothpick to hold it in place.)
    b. Twist ¼ turn and wrap the ribbon around again. This time, tie the ribbon in a knot and bow. (Once again, a toothpick can help hold it in place.)
2. Using a toothpick, poke holes around the orange in any pattern.
3. Insert a clove into each hole.
4. Give it away!

Go Deeper Encourage the children to continue to share joy this week, especially within their families.

****Ask families to bring the baby Jesus from their creche to church next week!****

Closing Prayer Use the Family Prayer tear pad from the Prayer Box to create a prayer together. Have a child read it as the closing prayer.

Advent Week 4 Almost, Not Yet

Opening Song Choose a song from the Little Box of Good News YouTube channel:

Lesson Depending on your church's Christmas tradition, you might take this week to practice for a Christmas pageant with the children.
If there is not a Christmas pageant to prepare, you can still focus on the story of Jesus' birth that is almost, but not yet. However, since most churches do not have children's church during the Christmas services, this is a great time to talk about it in detail with the children.
Read *the nativity story from any children's Bible or any picture book*. For book recommendations and suggestions, please reference the Little Box of Good News Recommended Book List.

Activity Wrap Baby Jesus
Remind the children that Jesus is the most important present that we receive on Christmas Day. A wonderful way to remember this is to have the baby Jesus be the first thing that we unwrap on Christmas morning.
Provide *wrapping paper, scissors, and tape*.
Assist children and families in wrapping the baby Jesus from their creche so they can bring it home to unwrap on Christmas morning.
Be sure to remind parents in advance to bring their baby Jesus!

Go Deeper If allowed, let the children wrap the church's baby Jesus. Then, on Christmas, they can unwrap it in the back of the church before carrying it into the service.

Closing Prayer Use the Family Prayer tear pad from the Prayer Box to create a prayer together. Have a child read it as the closing prayer.

What is a Little Circle of Good News?

A Little Circle of Good News is a gathering of families who all receive and are using the Little Box of Good News®. It helps families connect with each other and their local Episcopal Church.

Are you already registered as a Little Circle of Good News?

Use the included poster to share your upcoming gatherings.

Be sure to let us know if you have any updates to your listing (or if you do not see it on our website!). You can reach us at littleboxofgoodnews@edola.org.

Parishes using Little Box of Good News® as your primary faith formation:

Little Circle Sundays are written into the curriculum once a month as an intergenerational experience for your whole congregation. Please let us know if you need any assistance in getting these started.

Check the website map to make sure that your parish is listed!

Are you ready to start a Little Circle of Good News?

To host a Little Circle of Good News, a church needs:

- Parish Support
    - Subscribe to get a Little Box of Good News parish version.
      This will include the same elements as the family version, but with additional resources for you as a church.
    - Include the Little Circle of Good News as one of your parish ministries.
    - Include in updates and announcements
    - Provide space for gatherings (and food, if possible)

- Priest Support
    - The parish priest encourages families and joins them for gatherings when possible.
    - Be aware of the contents of each box, paying particular attention to the community aspect. This is the piece that families will bring back into the parish.

- Host Family
    - This family, who receives the box themselves, is willing to coordinate monthly get-togethers of families involved.
    - This is the go-to person when a new family wants to join.
    - This role can rotate among families as the Circle develops.

- Gatherings
    - If you are using the Little Box of Good News® as your primary faith formation program, these gatherings are integrated into the curriculum once a month.
    - Monthly or quarterly meetings of families receiving the Little Box of Good News.
    - This time of fellowship and community has no set script or rules. Families may want to discuss an element of the box or share about their experiences. However, gathering for a meal and play is just as important!
    - New families subscribing to the box should be welcomed! (If the circle feels like it is getting too big for one gathering space, then feel free to break into smaller groups.)
    - These can take place at the parish, at a park, at a family's home, or really anywhere the group wants to meet.

Our team is happy to help your church get started! Please reach out to us at littleboxofgoodnews@edola.org.

Little Circle of Good News Gathering Ideas

You can choose one of these formats for your monthly gathering as a whole community (or create your own idea)!

Little Circle of Good News Gathering Ideas for Advent

(individual planning guides follow this summary)

Intergenerational Advent Wreath Building	Gather as a whole community to create beautiful advent wreaths that each family unit can take home. Use the guide included to make it a meaningful time of sharing and community.
Cookies and Caring	Gather for a fun holiday party with a twist. Have each family bring several dozen of their favorite type of cookie to share. In addition, bring gifts for those in need in your community. This might be done through a parish Angel Tree or through your local nursing home or hospital. This helps the children connect giving back with our Christian celebrations.

Remember, this is YOUR parish's little circle. There is no right or wrong way to gather!

Little Circle of Good News Gathering Idea

Intergenerational Advent Wreath Making	Gather as a whole community to create beautiful advent wreaths that each family unit can take home. Use the guide included to make it a meaningful time of sharing and community.

Action Plan:

Date for Service: _____

Refreshments provided by: _____

Supplies needed: per family: *metal wreath with four candle holders, three blue or purple candles, one pink candle, green foliage, ribbons and flowers (can be artificial)*

Who will provide supplies: _____

Who will lead the preparations: _____

Who will lead the activity: _____

Who will clean up: _____

Building the Advent Wreath - An intergenerational activity

The leader may follow this script but feel free to adapt it to make it work for your setting!

Guidelines to keep it intergenerational:

- Only two people per household should sit at any given table.
- Each table should have children and adults.
- Children are encouraged to NOT sit with their own parents.
- Without asking anyone's age, try to mix age groups at each table (if everyone look about your age, find a different table).
- We will tell you a little about the wreath and give instructions for putting it together. Take your time, take turns, and everyone can share their answers. If there is not time for everyone to share answers for one question, then someone who has not shared can answer the next question.
- No one should feel forced to share, but everyone should feel welcomed and encouraged!

We start with a circle and wrap it in evergreens to represent eternity. Like the circle, God has no beginning and no end.

- Share one of your earliest Christmas memories.

Pause

The first blue candle represents Hope.

- Share something that you hope for this year for Christmas.

Pause

The second blue candle represents Peace.

- Share what you do during this busy time to experience peace.

Pause

The third candle is pink. It celebrates Gaudete Sunday (meaning rejoice in Latin) and signifies Joy.

- Share something that brings you joy.

Pause

The final candle is blue again. This last week of Advent represents Love.

- Share who you love that you will get to see this holiday.

Pause

Each of us is unique and brings unique gifts to the world. Send two people from your table to get some decorations for your Advent wreath. Each wreath will be different just like us.

- Share something that makes you unique.

Pause

Your Advent wreath is now complete! May it help you mark the days and weeks in preparation for Jesus coming at Christmas.

- Share any other ways that you like to prepare for Christmas!

Pause

Each household should get one Advent wreath. If someone else in your household has one, then please let another person at your table take yours!

Little Circle of Good News Gathering Idea

Cookies and Caring

Gather for a fun holiday party with a twist. Have each family bring several dozen of their favorite type of cookie to share. In addition, bring gifts for those in need in your community. This might be done through a parish Angel Tree or through your local nursing home or hospital. This helps the children connect giving back with our Christian celebrations.

Action Plan:

Date for Gathering: _____

Food provided by: _____

Who will organize/order: _____

Who will lead the activity: _____

Who will clean up: _____

Sermon Ideas:

Advent as the New Year for church.

Keeping Jesus first on Christmas morning.

Music:

We encourage churches to use the Little Box of Good News™ music!
For licensing permissions, contact Bishopmusic, at admin@bishopmusic.net. Copyright ©Ronald Clingenpeel, ASCAP 2024. *Fr. Ron has already assured us that all parishes will be given permission, but please still contact him!*

Bulletin Insert:

Did you know that our diocese has a tool to help you have faith conversations as a family? All families are invited to receive the Little Box of Good News®! To subscribe or purchase a box, go to littleboxofgoodnews.com. Our parish discount code is _____.

For all of the Little Box of Good News® resources
(Website, Podcast, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) visit:

Please reach out to us at littleboxofgoodnews@edola.org to prepay for a discount code for families!
Weekly bulletin tips for families can be copied from our email newsletter!

Additional Ideas and Resources for your Community

Community Connection:

Intergenerational Advent Wreath Making	Gather as a whole community to create beautiful advent wreaths that each family unit can take home. Use the guide included in the Little Circle section (pages 14-16) to make it a meaningful time of sharing and community.
Community Jesse Tree	Create a Jesse Tree in your church's sanctuary or parish hall so everyone can engage with it.

Going Deeper as a Community:

A Family Friendly Lighting of the Advent Wreath	Use the prayers on pages 20 and 21 with your church's advent wreath lighting each week. Print these and share with families so that they can also be used at home.
Community Advent Calendar	Set up a large wooden or fabric Advent Calendar display in the parish hall or community gathering space. Each week, reveal a parish-wide acts-of-kindness prompt or prayer focus for the week. In preparation for this, have different parish groups (youth ministry, senior groups, men's/women's groups) contribute their ideas for the weekly activity and focus. In addition, you can provide advent calendars for each household, such as this one published by our partner Forward Movement each year.

First Week of Advent: HOPE

Leader: Today we light the first candle (*blue/purple)* of the Advent wreath. Each candle has a meaning. The first candle is for hope.

Scripture: We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. (Psalm 33:20)

Wonder Questions:

- I wonder what hope means to you?
- I wonder what you hope for this Christmas?
- I wonder how hope in God is different from hoping for Christmas presents?

(Parent hint: the word hope in the Bible means expectation, trust and confidence.)

- I wonder what you hope for from God?

Prayer: Jesus, we hope in you.
Jesus, we trust in you.
Jesus, please fill us with your love.

Second Week of Advent: PEACE

Leader: Today we light the first and second candles (*blue/purple)* of the Advent wreath. Each candle has a meaning. The first candle is for hope. The second candle is for peace.

Scripture: Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. (Colossians 3:15)

Wonder Questions:

- I wonder what peace means to you?
- I wonder what brings you peace?
- I wonder how God's peace is special?
- I wonder how we can bring God's peace to the world?

Prayer: Jesus, we hope in you.
Jesus, please give us your peace
And help us be peacemakers in our world.

Third Week of Advent: JOY

Leader: Today we light the first and second candles (*blue/purple)* and now we add the third candle (*pink)* of the Advent wreath. Each candle has a meaning. The first candle is for hope. The second candle is for peace. The third candle is for joy.

Scripture: You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:12)

Wonder Questions:

- I wonder what joy means to you?
- I wonder what brings you joy?
- I wonder how God's joy is special?
- I wonder how we can bring God's joy to the world?

Prayer: Jesus, we hope in you.
Jesus, we live in your peace.
Jesus, please fill us with your joy
And help us share it with the whole world.

Fourth Week of Advent: LOVE

Leader: Today we light all of the candles of the Advent wreath. Each candle has a meaning. The first candle is for hope. The second candle is for peace. The third candle is for joy. This final candle is for love.

Scripture: Jesus said to them, I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34)

Wonder Questions:

- I wonder what makes you feel loved?
- I wonder how God's love is special?
- I wonder how we can bring God's love to the world?

Prayer: Jesus, we hope in you.
Jesus, we live in your peace.
Jesus, we are full of your joy.
Jesus, please give us your love
And help us share it with the whole world.

Need help? Contact us!

Grace Rose

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- Curriculum development
- Designing your program
- Adapting to your space
- Little Circle of Good News

Administrative Team

littleboxofgoodnews@edola.org

- Ordering, Payments & Coupon Codes
- Scheduling a visit
- Website issues

Lauren Dunn

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- Podcast ideas
- Faith formation for middle and high schoolers
- Youth Ministry & Young Adult Ministry
- Safe Environment

Social Media

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- Social Media