

'Each One, Reach One' this Advent and Christmas season

The song "I'll be home for Christmas" will soon be heard in malls and over the radio, now that we have entered the Advent season. But...will we all be home for Christmas? Will the thousands, indeed millions, of non-practicing members of our Catholic family of faith be among those who gather to adore the Newborn King? That might, in part, be up to us.

Obedient to the Lord's command to "go and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt. 28:19-20), and grateful for having been touched by the Lord's love, we must each make ourselves available to be used by God as "everyday evangelizers" during this great season of rejoicing. By doing the following things, God will use us to draw to his church those who are inactive, as well as those who have no church home.

Prayerfully consider at least one person whom you should invite to church. Think of that family member, neighbor, co-worker or friend who has been away from the church for a while, and pray that God will prepare the ground for an invitation. Do not let up until God has facilitated an evangelistic conversation between the two of you. Ask the intercession of the great missionary to Asia who baptized a million people, the co-patron of missions: St. Francis Xavier (Feast day: Dec. 3.) Ask the intercession of St. Juan Diego (Feast Day: Dec. 9) and Our Lady of Guadalupe (Feast day: Dec. 12.) Pray to the Holy Spirit, the primary agent of the new evangelization: God alone can touch and change hearts, so ask him daily, until the end of the Christmas season, to move among us with grace for conversion and renewal. He will



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surely aid you in reaching at least one person!

Invite someone over! Invite that person God puts on your heart and

in your path to attend a church service: to Mass, a penance service, a potluck dinner, a talk, a prayer gathering or a Christmas play. Invite them to serve with you in a soup kitchen or wrapping gifts for children. Invite them to whatever you think is most appropriate given their situation... but invite them!

Live as an authentic disciple of Christ. As someone who freely and joyfully confesses Jesus as Lord and Savior, and as the Master of our lives. Examine your life to see if there are areas in which further growth is needed and possible at this time of grace. Make amends. Change bad habits into good ones. Speak more kindly to others. Do what it takes to show that you are serious about conversion, discipleship, and Christian growth. Walk the walk, so that you might convincingly talk the talk.

Proclaim the Good News to all those whom God puts in your path. Do so with the same love and care with which Jesus did. Speak about the love and mercy of Christ, the "friend of sinners" who is eager to see his children gather for worship and instruction, so as to pour life divine into our souls. Share with them what participating in the life of the parish

means to you. Answer their questions and ask relevant questions that might lead them to consider Christ and the church in a new way this Christmas.

Work alongside other believers and people of good will to create a civilization of love in which the dignity of all God's children is respected. Take time to serve someone in need — and bring a friend along! Advent and Christmas are certainly a great time to show our love in action: to share of ourselves and our resources, not only from our surplus but even from our want, to make room in the "inn" of our hearts and homes for anyone in need.

Pope John Paul II stated in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 3: "God is opening before the church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission ad gentes. No believer in Christ, no institution of the church, can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples." The time has surely come for each one to reach one! This Advent and Christmas make it your personal aim to reach at least one person with the Good News of salvation. If we each reach one, many more people within this archdiocese may happily sing "I'll be home for Christmas..." — and be home literally and not simply "in their hearts."

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Daily Advent and Christmas evangelization prayer

Lord Jesus,
You call us to be *disciples on mission, everyday evangelized evangelizers.*
Help us to live our faith so fully and share the faith so freely that hundreds of men and women may come to know Your love and salvation. May the world realize that 2000 years ago "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life." (John 3:16)

You are that Son. You are the Savior of the world without whom we cannot have life, and life to the full. (John 10:10)

May each one reach one so that together we might evangelize the world — one person at a time!

We ask this in your most precious name.

*Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us.
Saints Francis Xavier and Thérèse of Lisieux, Co-Patrons of Missions, pray for us.
St. Juan Diego, pray for us.*

I recently came across two articles concerning the population decline in the world ("demographic winter" in the words of one writer). They are thought provoking and indicate the consequences which ensue when people refuse to accept God and the plan he has for the universe. One was the transcript of a speech given in mid-November by Don Feder. He cites a demographer, Philip Longman, author of *The Empty Cradle*, who states: "The ongoing global decline in human birthrates is the single most powerful force affecting the fate of nations and the future of society in the 21st century." The statistics given are disturbing.

The fall in fertility rates in today's world is unprecedented. Fifty-nine nations — 44 percent of the earth's population — have fertility rates below what is need to replace the nations' people. Not a single nation of Europe reproduces itself now. The average number of children needed by a nation's couple is 2.1 — two children to replace the parents and then a little more to replace children who died before child-bearing age. But the overall rate for Europe is only 1.3. (Russia has

a 1.1 rate and Italy, famous for families and *bambinos*, has only a 1.2). We often think of African and Asiatic nations as teeming with people. But this is not always the case. The following Asiatic nations do not reproduce themselves: South Korea, China, Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka. The world's lowest birth rate is probably Hong Kong at 0.9.

Some people will see this as a good thing, since it will help to ease pollution of the world. I have read articles recently by writers who talk about reducing the earth's population to one billion or less, so that the planet can regain its health. We in the United States do not reproduce ourselves, but we do not notice it because of massive immigration. Some European nations too have been able to sustain their population by immigration. But that has often produced conflicts between the native population and the new immigrants, especially when their cultures clash, as can be seen in France,

Population problems



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Germany, Switzerland, and Spain, where large numbers of people have come from North Africa and the Near East.

Another problem stemming from such low birth rates is the presence of an increasingly older population with a decreasing work force to support the retirement programs of a nation. Many commentators speak of "4-2-1 societies," that is, societies with four grandparents, two parents, supported by one child. The continued financing of the social security programs of such countries becomes doubtful.

What kind of moral judgment should we make concerning this increasing decline of birth rates? The factors driving the decline

are multiple. But certainly one is the widespread use of birth control and abortion. According to demographers just under half the world's population use contraceptives and 40 million abortions occur every year. These means of population control are intrinsically evil. God will never bless such endeavors.

The decline in marriage in the world is another factor. Cohabitation is increasingly practiced, an arrangement not conducive to bringing children into the world. And many men and women today delay starting a marriage and a family for various financial and professional reasons. But after 35 years of age, it becomes increasingly difficult for a woman to conceive.

The other article I read was by Brian Clowes, entitled "Japan in the Death Spiral." The author used Japan as an example or the results of neglecting to build families. The country's rate of reproduction is only child per couple. Japan is now the

oldest country in the world, the country's median age being 43. In 2050, it will be 61. Thousands of schools have been closed in recent years; tens of thousands of teachers have lost their jobs. Older people wonder if there will be a sufficient number of workers in the future to support their retirement. Yet 70 percent of young Japanese women say they have no intention of marrying: children are too much of a burden! This has been the logical consequence of decades of secular propaganda promoting abortion, contraception, hedonistic living, etc.

The authors of these articles agree that the answer to these trends is a spiritual and religious one, a return to an understanding of God's plan for the human race, to an appreciation of the value of family, the joys that children provide, the satisfaction of unselfish married love. Like every social problem, the basic solution of increasing infertility is a spiritual one. But how hard it is to bring people to understand this!

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