Episcopal
Relief & Development
Working Together for Lasting Change

EPISCOPAL RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT *and the Advent Wreath*

Christina Clark

Set aside a time each day to light the candle, pray, and learn about Episcopal Relief & Development's work with **children**.

How can you, as an individual, a family, or a congregation, make a significant change in the lives of children this Advent?

THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT - HOPE

Read: Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you. *(Psalm 33:20-22)*

Reflect: Psalm 33 is all about celebrating God. It invites us to make music with the lyre, with the harp, and with a new song. It also reminds us that the world is God's; created and loved with steadfast faith. This Advent, as the music of the season begins to fill our spaces and our hearts, how will we turn our thoughts and actions to help those whom God loves in other parts of the world?

Learn: Think about the children in your life and consider, what do young children need, in the first thousand days of life, to grow and thrive? What happens when basic resources like food, clean water, health care and basic safety are not accessible? How do not only children, but families and whole communities, suffer when children's needs aren't met. Learn about Episcopal Relief & Development's ***Moments That Matter®*** program to nurture children and strengthen entire communities.

SHARE

This first week in Advent, think of your friends and family who care about children and tell them about Episcopal Relief & Development's work with children aroung the world. Invite them to join you in becoming a prayer partner by signing up here.

GIVE

Begin to wonder how you, as an individual, a family, or a congregation, might contribute to support Episcoapl Relief & Development's work with children. What if we all gave up one Christmas gift this year, and used that money to support children and families around the world? S**igning up here**.

PRAY

Almighty God, you sent your son to teach us to love. Inspire and strengthen us, as we await the coming of the Christ child, to look with love on your children around the world. Guide us to do your will by shining that love on them from our own bounty, in the light of our Savior, born a child, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT - PEACE

Read: Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. *(Isaiah 32:16-18)*

Reflect: What is 'righteousness?' Is it always being the best, being right – which would imply that someone else must be wrong? This passage from Isaiah, which comes shortly after the prophet tells us of the coming of the Christ child, who shall be called the Prince of Peace, points us to something much bigger and better than being right to someone else's wrong. Isaiah points us to a righteousness that will bring security, stability, trust, and peace. Forever. What a glorious vision, and one that each of us has the power to bring about in our own small way

Learn: What does Isaiah's vision mean to a child, a family, and an entire community, in Angola, Burundi, Guatemala, Myanmar or Zambia? Spend some time finding out here.

SHARE

How often do we sign onto our social media feeds, only to find them filled with anxiety and division? On Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, Episcopal Relief & Development shares photos and words of inspiration as well as direct actions that improve lives around the world. Like, follow and share these posts to brighten this season of anticipation for your followers.

GIVE

Now that you're spreading the message of hope and peace, consider starting a social media Advent/Christmas fundraiser asking your family and friends to help you support children around the world through the work of **Episcopal Relief & Development**.

PRAY

Almighty God, as we await the coming of the Christ child and prepare to sing of "peace on earth, goodwill to all," help us to remember that our own peace must be bound in the peace of all your children on earth. Open our eyes and our hearts during this season of joy and giving, that we would treat every child as lovingly as we welcome the Savior, born a child, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT - JOY (REJOICE)

Read: And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.And the angel of the Lord said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. *(Luke 2:9-11, KJV)*

Reflect: As we move through Advent, most years the season becomes increasingly busy and for many people laced with stress and anxiety. Why is that? How have we come from "Good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" to frantic lists of things to do and gifts to buy and events to attend along with a constant barrage of nearly aggressive cheer coming at us from all directions. We may not be able to turn off the muzak in the stores, but we can make time and space in these shortening days to pray

Learn: Nothing brings a more genuine and holy sense of joy than working in the right relationship with our siblings to improve the lives of children and their families. Spend time watching these **videos** and rejoice that God gives us an opportunity, every day, to heal divides, repair broken systems, and lift up whole communities.

SHARE

As your own spirit is lifted by one or more of these stories, share them wherever you can. Children can share them with their classmates and friends, youth groups might watch them together, we can email them or share them on our social media feeds. Find a creative and fun way to tie the season into your fundraising efforts, by holding a bake-a-thon or starting a competition to see who can go the longest without hearing a particularly grating Christmas carol.

GIVE

As you share the videos and stories of how this campaign is making real and lasting change for children and families, add to your fundraising efforts by asking friends, colleagues, or family members to partner with you in donating to **Episcopal Relief & Development** in one another's names rather than exchanging gifts this year.

PRAY

Almighty God, as we approach the birth of the Christ child, turn us from thoughts of frantic busyness to the message of hope and good tidings of great joy, which shall be for all people. Help us to share the joy-filled love of your Son, our Savior, born a small and helpless child, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT - LOVE

Read: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. *(Mark 12:30-31)*

Reflect: It seems so simple when we read Jesus' words in the Gospel, but how do we act upon these commandments? Many of us love to give gifts at Christmas not just because it's the custom, but because we are gifted in return by seeing joy in the face of a loved one when they see what we've chosen to show them our love. What if we loved every child as we love our own children; loved communities across the globe the way we love our own community?

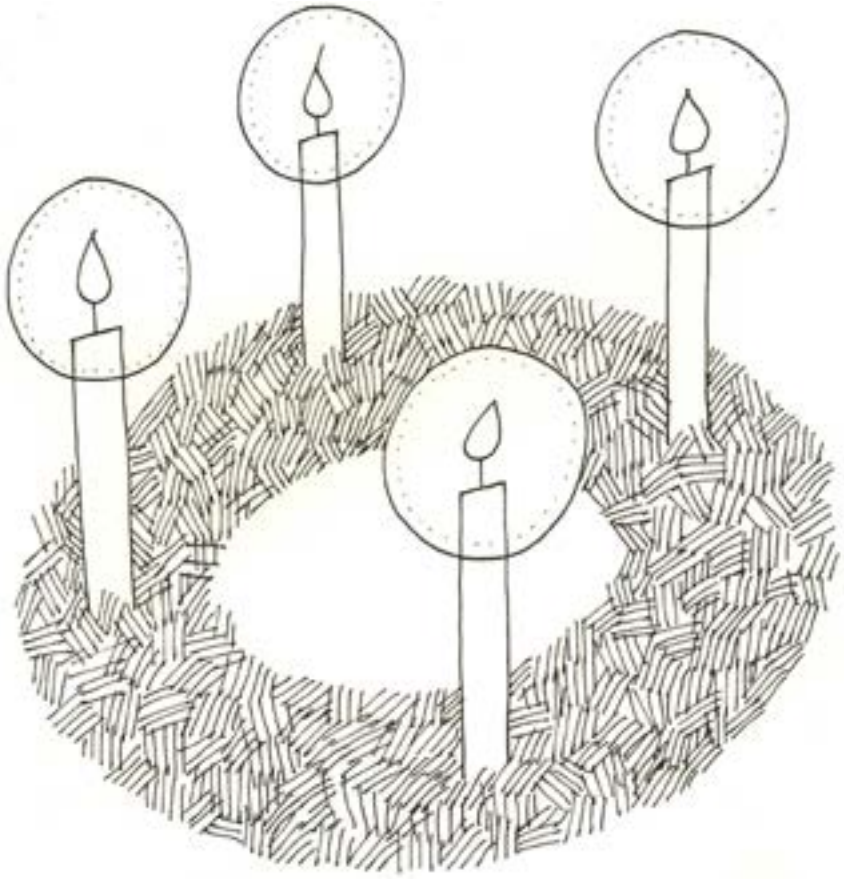
Learn: Episcopal Relief & Development supports work in direct and loving relationships with the children and families around the world. Our model uses an integrated approach to sustainably lift people from poverty and disease into healthy and empowered communities. *Gifts for Life* is a program that transforms lives by providing vital resources and an opportunity to grow those resources and build independence.

SHARE

Do you have a friend who loves goats? A family member who believes access to clean water is a human right and responsibility? A colleague who is passionate about early childhood development? Tell them about the *Gifts for Life* program, which allows them to choose a gift that fits their financial position as well as supporting their dreams for building beloved community.

GIVE

We can continue this journey beyond the Christmas season. Stay involved by becoming a prayer partner, setting up a recurring donation, or using your fundraising efforts to purchase a *Gifts for Life*. Drop a coin in the Hope Chest every time you hear your least favorite Christmas song or donate in your friends' or office's name in place of giving each other a trinket this year.

PRAY

Almighty God we thank you for the gift of your son, for the sacred time and space to anticipate His coming, and for the opportunity to truly love our neighbors as ourselves, as he implored us. Grant that we may share the hope, peace, joy, and love of this season with all your creation as we celebrate the birth of your Son, our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.