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Christmas Tips from the Wise Men and Women of the University of Dayton

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CHRISTMAS TIPS FROM THE WISE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

GIFTS THAT KEEP GIVING -- People can take the materialism out of and put meaning back into Christmas in several ways, says Sister Nancy Bramlage, S.C., coordinator of Campus Ministry's office of social concerns. Families can make a commitment to a work project, such as Habitat for Humanity, a food pantry or a homeless shelter; people can give direct donations--in the name of someone on their gift list--to homeless shelters and service projects; and they can ask a shelter to recommend someone who needs a sponsor. For example: They can pay for a job training class for someone who needs new skills.

Contact Sister Nancy Bramlage, S.C., at (513) 229-2576.

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED -- Sleepless Christmas Eves surrounded by wrapping paper and directions in Japanese are too familiar to Gordon Sargent, UD's vice president for graduate studies and research and dean of graduate studies. A father of seven and a mechanical engineer, Sargent ignores instructions for assembling complex toys "unless I'm really desperate." He also discourages parents who are toy assembly rookies from taking the task on themselves. "If you can afford it, pay someone else," he says. For those who insist on doing it themselves and become frustrated early Christmas morning, he has some sound advice: "Go to bed and sleep it off. I don't recommend to go drink. That makes the situation worse."

Contact Gordon Sargent at (513) 229-2343.

PLANT FOOD -- Are poinsettias poisonous? "It won't kill you, but I wouldn't want to chew on the thing," says Brother Don Geiger, S.M., professor of biology. The white sap from the plant can cause a red skin rash, but the plant itself is not very poisonous; you would have to eat 15 leaves before you would start to feel sick, says Geiger.

Contact Brother Don Geiger, S.M., at (513) 229-2509.

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GOD BLESS US, EVERYONE -- What's a good way to establish the Christmas spirit between parents and children? Get a good copy of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol and read it aloud to your children, suggests Eugene August, professor of English. "It's not a pretty picture of Christmas--it's about putting your priorities right at Christmas" and "using capitalism and money for the benefit of the whole society," says August. That's a refreshing message when you're tempted to "shop till you drop," he says.

Contact Eugene August at (513) 229-3428.

KIDS LIKE THE CLASSICS -- Children prefer the old standards to the battery-operated, budget-breaking fads of today, says Mary Jane Kelleher, director of UD's Children's Center for Young Learners. "The less specific a toy is, the better," she says. Kelleher recommends Legos, Tinker Toys, Lincoln Logs and blocks; housekeeping toys or dress-up kits that permit children to stretch their creativity through dramatic play; records and tapes, books, finger paints, rag dolls and clay; and safe and simple toys a child can play with without much supervision.

Contact Mary Jane Kelleher at (513) 229-2158.

THE BEST THINGS ARE FREE -- For some, the holidays can be a troubling time--particularly during a recession--so people and families who are unemployed should make a special effort to engage in free holiday activities, says Patricia Voydanoff, director of the University of Dayton Center for the Study of Family Development. "During economic hard times, there is a tendency to become depressed," says Voydanoff. "To prevent this, it is important to see friends, to get out and do things, to not become isolated. Isolation just increases the likelihood of being depressed." Voydanoff suggests checking your local newspaper for free activities. She also recommends church activities and doing volunteer work with other families.

Contact Patricia Voydanoff at (513) 229-4614.

A ROLY-POLY CHRISTMAS -- Serve turkey for a healthful Christmas dinner, recommends Madeline Dellwo, assistant professor of human ecology and a registered dietician. "It's very low-cal, especially the white meat," says Dellwo. Your dinner should also include vegetables and salad, but avoid a lot of gravy and cream sauces, she says. Pumpkin pie is low-fat, but sidestep the ice cream and whipped cream, adds Dellwo. "People really shouldn't deprive themselves at this time of year, but you can get through the holidays without gaining 10 pounds."

Contact Madeline Dellwo at (513) 229-2157.

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SOUNDS OF SILENCE -- Christmas songs emerge around Thanksgiving, and people are jingle-belled out by Christmas. Some suggestions to avoid overloading on the classics: Linda Snyder, chair of UD's music department, recommends "Christmas Music for Acappella Choir" by the Dale Warlund Singers; "The Sound of Christmas" by Julie Andrews, a collection of songs from her TV special; and "Mannheim Steamroller Christmas Album" by Mannheim Steamroller, synthesized versions of carols. Donna Cox, assistant professor of music and director of the Ebony Heritage Singers, suggests "Go Tell it on the Mountain," "Mary Had a Baby," "Oh Mary, What You Goin' to Call Your Baby," "Go Ring the Bells" and "Rise Up Shepherds and Follow."

Contact Linda Snyder at (513) 229-3936 or Donna Cox at (513) 229-3946.

A DEBT TO SOCIETY -- Millions of people will open their credit card bills this winter and stare in wonderment at how much they spent. Barbara De Luca, assistant professor of human ecology, says the time to avoid the syndrome is now. She recommends using cash to pay for food, placing limits on credit card use and using the 20 percent rule: Think of your January and February take-home pay, and don't run up debts to more than 20 percent of that. Better yet, make it 15 percent.

Contact Barbara De Luca at (513) 229-2156.

PICTURE PERFECT GIFTS -- A book is one of the best gifts you can give a child, says Ann Raney, director of UD's Curriculum Materials Center. Look for appealing covers and illustrations and subjects that age-appropriate, interesting, non-stereotypical and accurate, she says. Among Raney's many choices of picture books for early readers are Owl Moon by Jane Yolen, Polar Express by Chris Van Allsburg and Jolly Postman by Janet and Allan Ahlberg. For older readers, Raney suggests Charlotte's Web by E.B. White, Number the Stars by Lois Lowry and The Whipping Boy by Sid Fleischman.

Contact Ann Raney at (513) 229-3140.

IS THAT ALL THERE IS? -- Looking forward to Christmas but dreading the chores, expense and commercialism? Sister Mary Louise Foley, F.M.I., a campus minister, offers these tips from her annual workshop on planning the "right" kind of Christmas: Don't bring hidden expectations to family celebrations and strive to accept each member of the family as he or she really is, set aside time to get together with your closest friends and jot down the things you really enjoy doing at Christmas and make them a priority—even if it means not writing as many cards.

Contact Sister Mary Louise Foley, F.M.I., at (513) 229-2093.

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ANOTHER TIE? -- Things that might be consumed make good gifts for older people, says Brother Stan Mathews, S.M., University rector, who often works with older people in the area. "You're going to use stationary or eat mixed nuts--you're not adding to things that they won't know what to do with later," says Mathews. He also suggests matching gifts to older persons' hobbies and giving tickets to shows or sporting events--especially for people who don't get out much. Mathews' favorite gifts, however, are books. For the visually impaired, special large-print editions of The New York Times or other periodicals and books can help as well as entertain, he says.

Contact Brother Stan Mathews at (513) 229-4122.

COME, LORD JESUS -- A time of waiting for Jesus' birth at Christmas, Advent also symbolizes a lifelong longing for God, says Father Jerry Chinchar, S.M., a campus minister. For family Advent celebrations, he suggests to "sing a verse of 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel' before dinner and add a specific petition for how you want the Lord to come into your life."

Contact Father Jerry Chinchar, S.M., at (513) 229-2725.

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Media note: If you have trouble reaching any of these individuals during the holiday season, please call Jim Feuer, director of media relations, at (513) 229-3241 or (513) 522-7155.