

'Tis the Season A to Z

Advent Activities List

Advent is a time of remembrance and a time of waiting. It is a time to reflect on the previous year and a time to prepare for the birth of Jesus. It is a special time to reconnect with the mystery and wonder of faith. However, with so many different ways to celebrate the season, it can sometimes feel overwhelming for those of us in charge of creating the magic. Thankfully, we've pulled together a collection of some of our favorite things for this special season. We hope this A to Z list will help free up time in your own life so that you, the wonderful youth worker, will also have time to experience the wonder of it all. Blessed Advent, my friends!

A – Advent Calendars

- Purchase chocolate-filled calendars for each youth (or ask congregation members to donate calendars that you can then give to your youth).
- Create your own online calendar using www.myadvent.net.
- Send a daily text during Advent with a link to the day's scripture.
- Print off an activity Advent calendar. (Etsy has great options or make your own.)

B – Baking

- Host a cookie exchange, asking each youth to bring 2 dozen cookies.
 - o Alternatively, ask congregation members to donate cookies.
 - o Youth then choose 2 dozen new cookies to bring home.
 - o Create decorated containers of assorted cookies to drop off to homebound members or local emergency personnel.
- Bake and decorate cookies during youth group.
 - o Using store bought cookie mix, let youth roll out and cut their own cookies. While baking, you can do a mini devotional. Then have assorted icings and sprinkles for youth to decorate.
 - o Package up these cookies to deliver to homebound members or local emergency personnel.
 - o Have a cookie decorating contest with different categories, judges (think Food Network's Christmas Cookie Challenge), and prizes.
- Decorate gingerbread houses.
 - o Ask each family to donate one gingerbread house kit and one additional decoration/candy.
 - o Break youth into teams to decorate.
 - o Invite church members to judge final products.
- Decorate gingerbread cookies.
 - o Make or purchase gingerbread men, icing, and decorations.
 - o Have youth draw names and then decorate their cookie to look like the person's name they drew.

C – Caroling

- Partner with the Music Director to host a caroling night.
 - o In the local neighborhood.
 - o At area nursing homes.
- Host a Christmas carol sing-along for the community.
 - o Invite friends, family, and other churches.
 - o Provide handouts with words to classic songs.
 - o Location options: church sanctuary, local park, city hall, parking lot.

D – Devotional

- If your church already sends out a devotional, encourage your youth to follow along as well, then discuss the previous week during youth group.
 - o www.saltproject.org
 - o www.sanctifiedart.org
 - o www.katebowler.com
 - o www.pres-outlook.org
- Youth write their own devotional.
 - o Assign each youth a scripture/hymn and ask them to write a short reflection. You can then send these out to youth each day or week.
- Use or purchase a youth specific devotional.
 - o www.d365.org
 - o www.illustratedministry.com

E – Exchange Gifts

- So many options here, but our favorite is the classic white elephant exchange because you don't have to worry about who will be there since everyone will bring one wrapped gift.
 - o Wrap up something you already own to give away.
 - o Have everyone bring the same thing (pair of socks, favorite board game, something soft, favorite big bag of candy, funny XL t-shirt).
 - o Make sure you establish the rules before you get started.
 - How many times can a gift get stolen?
 - Can you choose your own gift?
 - How long does everyone get to make their choice?
 - Are you drawing numbers or using the dice game to rotate gifts?
- If you have a pretty consistent group of youth coming, you could draw names and have them guess who their Secret Santa was at the end of Advent.
 - o One gift that you think the person will love (you'll need to do some investigating and getting to know each other to find the perfect gift).
 - o Give a different gift for each Sunday of Advent.
 - Week 1 (HOPE)
 - Something that is Christmas-y, the season of hope.
 - Week 2 (LOVE)
 - A type of candy you know your person loves.
 - Week 3 (JOY)
 - Something that will make them laugh.

- Week 4 (PEACE)
 - Something that is calming.

F – Family Dinner

- Invite families to join you Sunday night for a family-style dinner.
 - Each family brings their favorite holiday dish.
 - Each family brings their favorite ornament to share the story.
- Organize a progressive dinner in church member homes.
- Skip youth group and encourage families to sit down together for dinner.
 - Provide conversation starters around the Season of Advent.
 - Combine with initial day of Advent Wreath making.

G – Game Night

- Wear ugly Christmas sweaters or tacky Christmas gear for a night of fun!
- Break into teams to increase the competition.
- Provide prizes.
- Some of my favorite games:
 - Christmas words Pictionary
 - Christmas movie charades
 - Name that Tune with Christmas songs
 - Advent/Christmas trivia
 - Family Feud - Christmas edition
 - Pin the Nose on Rudolph
 - Snowman stack with marshmallows (who can build it tallest in 30 seconds)
 - Modify any minute-to-win-it game to be holiday festive.

H – Holiday Cards

- Provide supplies to make holiday cards (construction paper, tape, glue, glitter, stickers, markers, pom poms).
- Assign each youth the name of a session member or homebound member to make a personalized card of thanks and Merry Christmas.
- Teach kids how to address an envelope. (Seriously, many have NO idea!)
- Mail the cards and see the joy spread!

I – Instagram

- If your church has an Instagram account, have the youth fill it with Christmas pics!
- Each week set the theme (hope, love, joy, peace) and ask youth to share a picture of something that relates to the theme.
- During youth group, review the previous week's posts asking for stories to accompany the pictures.

J – Journal

- Beginning at Thanksgiving, provide each youth with a small journal.
- Encourage youth to reflect on the daily scripture verse (d365).
- Provide weekly prompts for youth to reflect on:
 - o What are you **thankful** for this holiday season?
 - o What brings you **hope** for the coming year?
 - o Where have you seen **love** in action this week?
 - o List as many things as you can that bring you **joy**.
 - o Write down your favorite scripture verse and explain how it can bring you **peace**.

K – Karaoke

- There is nothing better than a bunch of kids and adults letting loose and singing to their heart's content!
- If you have access to a tv or projector, pull up Christmas karaoke on YouTube.
- If you have a microphone, use that. Otherwise improvise with candy canes.
- Create teams and have each one choose the song they want to sing.
- Of course, provide prizes:
 - o Best Effort
 - o Best Choreography
 - o Best Singers
 - o Overall Best Performance

L – Lights

- Go see your town's Christmas lights! If there's a street or neighborhood with lots of Christmas lights and decorations, head there. Or load up the van or parent cars and go for a ride.
- End the evening at a local ice cream shop to share favorites.

M – Movie Night

- Wear your Christmas pajamas and bring a blanket/pillow for movie night!
- Go all out and recruit parents to make dinner/snacks related to the movie.
- Check if your church has a rating policy and make sure you've watched the whole movie first for appropriateness before showing it to the kids.
- Lots of great options, but here are some of my favorites:
 - o Elf (spaghetti with all the toppings for dinner)
 - o The Grinch (all green food)
 - o Miracle on 34th Street (most will not have seen!)
 - o Star (interesting conversation starter about how different people/animals may have approached the birth of Jesus)
 - o Home Alone (pizza, popcorn, Pepsi)

N – Nativity

- If your church hosts a Live Nativity, ask if the youth can help volunteer.

- If your church does not do a Live Nativity, look for options in your community that you could take the youth to visit.
- Invite older members of the congregation to join youth for dinner and bring their favorite nativity set to share over a meal.
- Build your own youth nativity set, each week adding a new piece until Christmas Day.
 - o Youth can sign up for the piece they want to contribute.
 - o Hide pieces around the church building and have the kids find them.

O – Ornament Making

- Find those crafty people in your congregation to help with this activity.
- Use complete ornaments to decorate a tree in the youth room or somewhere else in the church.
- Allow youth to take the ornament home, making sure they write the year on it for posterity.
- There are so many different ornaments you could make, but here are some of my favorites:
 - o Fill clear (plastic) balls with mini pompoms, glitter, bells, figurines.
 - o Wooden beads on pipe cleaners to make a starburst.
 - o Colored beads on wire to make bows.
 - o Make a cross out of popsicle sticks and paint. Add glitter.
 - o Wrap yarn around plastic grocery bags to make a colorful ball.
 - o Cinnamon applesauce ornaments.
 - o Mini polaroid pictures of each youth mounted on cardstock with ribbon.

P – Pageant

- If your church puts on a Christmas Pageant, find ways to include the youth.
 - o Serve as ushers.
 - o Help get children dressed.
 - o Host a cookies/milk reception after.
- If your church does not put on a Christmas Pageant, consider organizing one for children, youth, and their families.
 - o *A Very Mixed-Up Christmas Pageant* by Gwynne Watkins
 - o *Do Not Be Afraid: A Christmas Pageant* by Illustrated Ministry
 - o *No Stress, No Fuss Christmas Program* by Carolyn Peters with Theresa Cho and Nevan Hooker
 - o *"No Practice" Christmas Pageant*
 - www.nextchurch.net/no-practice-christmas-pageant
 - o *A Rehearsal Free Christmas Pageant*
 - www.rfour.org/christmas_pageant.html

Q – Quiet

- Yes, this season is full of fun, but it is also filled with stress for our youth.
- Take a night to light candles, put on quiet music, and invite youth to just lay back in quiet. If they end up napping, all the better.
- Go for a silent walk around town or take a daytime hike in silence.
- Have a yoga instructor come lead a session on meditation.

R – Read Christmas Stories

- Here's another spot to include congregation members in youth activities.
- Ask youth to each bring their favorite Christmas book that can be read aloud by a church member (teacher, grandparent).
- Stories to consider having on hand in case you need more:
 - o *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*
 - o *Green is for Christmas* by Drew Daywalt
 - o *The Gingerbread Man* by Gail Yerrill
 - o *Llama Llama Holiday Drama* by Anna Dewdney

S – Scripture

- In between planning all the silly, fun stuff of this season, remember to include “the reason for the season” too.
- One evening, provide multiple versions of the Bible and read the different accounts of the birth of Jesus.
 - o How do the gospels tell the story differently?
 - o How do the different versions of the Bible help you hear the story anew?
- Print off different scripture verses related to Christmas and have each youth randomly choose one to share with the group, offering why they think it is an important part of the story.
- If your church does Godly Play, ask if someone can tell The Mystery of Christmas story to the youth, with lots of wondering afterwards.

T – Tree Trimming

- Ask if the youth can help with decorating the church for Advent.
- Offer youth to help older members set up their Christmas trees in their homes.
- Teach the history of the Christmas Tree and the meaning of each ornament.

U – Unwrap/Wrap

- Host a gift wrapping party for church members as a fundraiser or act of service.
- Saran wrap pieces of candy into a big ball, then youth have to try to unwrap it wearing kitchen mitts. Each person only gets a set amount of time before they have to pass to the next person.

V – Volunteer

- Look for places around town where your youth can volunteer.
 - o Meal on Wheels
 - o Animal shelter
 - o Food banks
 - o Homeless shelters
 - o Toys for Tots
 - o Angel Tree
- Create your own volunteer opportunities.
 - o Fill up Free Little Pantries.

- Create holiday blessing bags.
- Make fleece blankets to deliver to area homeless shelter.

W – Wreath Making

- Ask for the Flower Committee’s help with this activity.
- Go small, using pipe cleaners to make mini wreaths.
- Go big, collecting greenery from around town to wrap around a cardboard or metal ring.
- Use deco mesh to make a colorful bubble wreath.

X – Xmas Eve Worship

- Second only to Easter Sunday, Christmas Eve worship is a great opportunity to connect with youth alum and families you have not seen in a while and meet visitors.
- Create a small postcard with information about your youth ministry program with a special invite for youth to join you in January!

Y – You

- This is your friendly reminder to take care of yourself during this busy season.
 - Go for a walk.
 - Take a nap.
 - Have lunch with a friend.
 - Delegate, delegate, delegate! (You do not need to do it all by yourself.)
 - Spend quiet time in the sanctuary by yourself.
 - Write down your hours to make sure you’re not overworking (ha!) and so you can comp time these hours sometime in the next month.

Z – Zoom

- This season is busy. Instead of hosting an in person youth group, one night you might just invite the youth to join you on Zoom for a quick check in.
 - Ask youth to give a tour of their Christmas tree.
 - Have them share their favorite Christmas decoration.
 - Close with a blessing.

An Advent Blessing

(Courtesy of ChatGPT!)

As we gather in this season of
Blessings, may we find
Comfort in the promise of
Deliverance.
Every day brings
Fresh hope and
Gratitude for the love that surrounds us.
Here, in the quiet moments, we discover
Inspiration to share kindness and
Joy with one another.
Keep our hearts free to hear to
Love's gentle whispers, leading us to paths of
Magic and wonder.
Nurtured by the light of the season, may we cultivate
Openness and
Peace within our souls.
Quiet our worries and remind us to seek
Rest in your grace, allowing us to
Savor the beauty around us.
Teach us to embrace each day with
Unwavering faith, knowing that
Victory is found in small acts of love.
Weaving together our stories, may we inspire
Expectation and excitement for the joys to come.
Yielding to the Holy Spirit of Advent, let us embrace the
Zeal of the Advent Season, today and every day to come.

Amen.



Author: Kim Ness - Presbyterian Youth Workers' Association ([PYWA](#)) Board Member (at time of publication)

Project Manager: Gina Yeager-Buckley



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission