

'Tis the season to be jolly-and busy! Families have to cook a turkey for the Thanksgiving potluck, shop, cook, clean for company, get their kids to choir rehearsal, attend the Advent program, wrap gifts, go caroling with their Bible study group, and drop the kids off for their Christmas party...



Wouldn't it be nice this holiday season to clear the church calendar and help families focus on what's really important about this season of the year? (Okay, I agree, one or two things are important to keep!)

Encourage families to set aside a Family Night each week. Perhaps they'll stay in for the evening, join with another family for fun activities, or serve another family. Share these ideas with families to help them plan for more than pizza and a movie.

## JUST OUR FAMILY

- Look at a photo album of family memories. Or watch clips from homemade family videos. Begin conversations with "Remember when..." Tape-record a good memory and send it to the person who was part of it.
- Buy a new game as a family gift for Christmas. Open it early and play it together.
- Work on a jigsaw puzzle. Play Christmas carols in the background.
- Each family night, read aloud a few chapters from *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens until it's finished.
- Have each family member choose a Christmas carol, read one verse, and tell why it has special meaning.
- Make special cards for grandparents. Together, write a message on each card.
- Have each family member think of something helpful to do for another family member. Write the idea on a piece of paper, sign it, and put it in a box. During the next seven days, do the helpful thing and present the box to the right recipient. Repeat this each week.
- Go for a walk together. Look for the brightest star, the largest pine cone, the most interesting house decorations, and so on.
- Help each other memorize a Christmas verse, a passage, or a psalm.
- Go through the alphabet naming gifts from God. The first person begins, "God gave our family an apple tree." The next person says, "God gave our family an apple tree and a basketball goal." Keep adding items. See how far your family can go through the alphabet and remember the gifts named.

## FAMILY FRIENDS

- Invite a family that's different from your own to dinner. It may be a single person, a single-parent family, or a family who has a child with special needs.
- Decorate Christmas cookies with another family. Use a roll of prepared sugar-cookie dough or make your own.
- Take a Christmas lights tour of your favorite places. Combine with other families to use the church bus. Or you could rent a bus if you have enough people. End your tour at someone's house for hot cider and Christmas cookies.
- Get with another family and each share one holiday tradition.
- Have a simple supper together that symbolizes togetherness in the family of God. It may be vegetable soup or a salad that both families contribute to. Note the individual parts and how they make up the whole. Include a loaf of bread to "break bread" together. Read [Acts 2:42-47](#).

## **FAMILY TO FAMILY**

- Make hot chocolate mix, freezer jam, or a simple fruit bread. Give to neighbors or people who live near your church. Write a Christmas message on each item.
- Join with other families to sing Christmas carols to elderly people.
- Trade child care with another family for an evening or Saturday so you can shop, bake, clean, decorate, or sleep.
- Help children shop for gifts for their parents (particularly in a single-parent household). Help children wrap and tag their gifts.
- Adopt a needy family and provide gifts and food for their Christmas celebration.

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