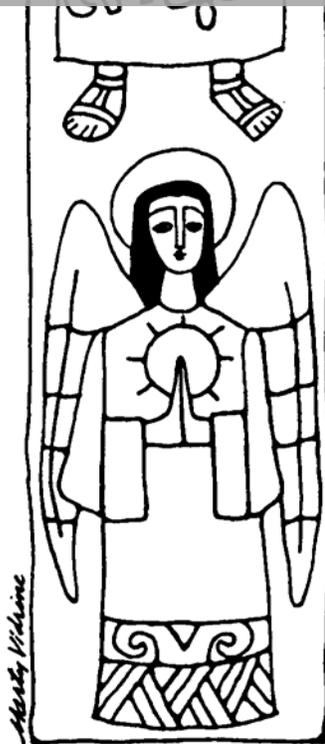




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CATHERINE  
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## UNPLUG THE CHRISTMAS MACHINE



Whose  
Birthday  
Is It,  
Anyway?

Put Love & Joy Back Into the Season  
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## ***Unplug the Christmas Machine Workshop***

### **Exercise 1: A Christmas Inventory**

#### **HOLIDAY PREPARATIONS**

1. Examine the list below and cross out any holiday preparations that are not likely to be part of your Christmas celebration this year. Add any that we have overlooked.

Masterminding the gift list	Making family Advent preparations
Inviting friends to the party	Cleaning up after Christmas
Buying stocking stuffers	Planning holiday menus for immediate family
Sorting through digital photos	Writing thank-yous
Composing Christmas Newsletter	Getting kids to write thank-yous
Cooking for the party	Putting away decorations
Making or buying stockings	Disposing of the tree
Cleaning for the party	Doing special grocery shopping for immediate family
Making travel plans	Doing holiday baking for family
Shopping for the party	Getting ready for relatives
Helping out at church	Taking down outside decorations
Cleaning up after the party	Cooking and shopping for family reunions
Helping out at school	Planning family reunions
Buying or cutting down a tree	Preparing for holiday travel
Shopping for gifts	Writing notes on cards
Decorating the tree	Putting up inside decorations
Making gifts	Putting up outside decorations
Helping with Christmas activities at work	Planning a holiday party for friends
Buying wrapping supplies	Volunteering for charity
Wrapping gifts	Managing family social media posts
Making or buying decorations for the house	
Mailing gifts	
Other :	

2. Now, put your initials beside each activity where you do most of the work.

3. Put an "X" after those activities that have little value to you, or that you do not have time to fully enjoy.



## FINANCES

In addition to the obvious expense of gift giving, there are many hidden costs to Christmas. This list will help bring them to your attention.

1. Put a check by your customary holiday expenses.

- Buying gifts, family, teachers, postman, priest, hairdresser, service providers, co-workers
- Craft supplies
- Gift-wrapping expenses
- Mailing gifts
- Extra dry cleaning
- Paying for extra services such as carpet cleaning, window cleaning, or housecleaning
- Higher food bills
- Travel expenses (car expenses, airplane tickets, hotels, pet boarding, etc.)
- Loss of paid work hours
- Extra linen, bedding, etc. for company
- Higher entertainment costs (movies, concerts, the Nutcracker etc.)
- Decorations for the tree and house
- Tree and other greenery
- Batteries, and keeping devices charged
- Candles
- More convenience meals during the pre-holiday rush
- Christmas cards
- Postage stamps
- Liquor
- Catering
- Flowers
- New holiday clothes
- Holiday tipping
- Donations to charities

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Estimate how much you or your family spent on all of the above expenses last year. .

3. Do you ordinarily stick to a holiday budget? \_\_\_\_\_

4. If you are married, is there clear communication about holiday spending between you and your spouse? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Who makes most of the holiday purchases? \_\_\_\_\_

**CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS**

1. What are the traditional elements of your holiday celebration? Look through this list and cross out the ones that you do not take part in and add those that are uniquely yours. (You may wish to list specific activities in the spaces provided.)

Gift exchange \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Christmas stockings \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Advent rituals \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Holiday baking \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Home entertaining \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Christmas activities at church \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Family religious traditions \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ethnic traditions \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Outdoor decorations \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Decorating the house \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Decorating a tree \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural events \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Singing or playing music \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Family games \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Charitable activities \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other special family traditions (for example, going skiing after Christmas, visiting a nursing home, special food rituals, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Underline those activities that usually give you and/or your family the most pleasure.
3. Put an "X" by the activities that you do not have time to fully enjoy or that seem to have lost their meaning for you or your family.
4. What special traditions did you do as a child that you no longer do? Star those that you wish you could add to your family celebration.

\_\_\_\_\_

## **THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS**

Many people find that certain circumstances foster spiritual experiences.

1. Complete the following sentence by checking all the appropriate responses and adding other comments if you wish. "I tend to feel most spiritually alive when I am..."

- alone
- in a worship community
- relaxed and unhurried
- meditating or praying
- reading the Bible or other religious books
- outdoors in a natural setting

Other:

2. How often were these conditions present the last holiday season? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Of all the various holiday activities offered by my church, these are the ones that help me feel most spiritually alive.

## **CHRISTMAS GIFTS**

In the space below, list all the people with whom you normally exchange gifts. (Be sure to include people who are easy to forget, such as neighbors, children of friends, co-workers, teachers, business acquaintances, service providers, etc.)

1. Put a dollar sign by the names of people for whom you normally purchase gifts that cost more than \$15.

2. Imagine yourself in each of the four imaginary situations:

a. You unexpectedly receive a check in the mail for \$500 to spend on Christmas gifts.

b. You have the next two weeks totally free of responsibilities (including your job and the care of children) so that you can devote all your time to making Christmas gifts.

c. All your friends and relatives decide to scale down their gift giving this year, happily exchanging stocking stuffers instead of more elaborate gifts.

d. Gifts are reserved for young children. Adults celebrate by feasting, worshipping, partying, singing, and playing games.

Which of these four imaginary situations seems most satisfying to you? \_\_\_\_\_ Be prepared to discuss why.

## PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Check all of the appropriate phrases. "Compared to other times of the year, during the period from Thanksgiving to New Year's, I...

- have less free time
- get less sleep
- get less exercise
- consume more sugar and fats
- drink more alcohol
- have more tasks and responsibilities
- have less time to be alone
- am more worried about money
- spend less relaxed time with friends
- have less relaxed time with my family
- have more responsibilities at work
- have other stresses

2. How does this make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Check the rejuvenating, coping techniques that are most effective in helping you relax and unwind.

- going for walks
- hot baths or showers
- meditation or prayer
- visiting close friends
- watching TV
- exercise or massage
- naps
- reading for pleasure
- spending time alone with your partner
- practicing yoga or other stretching exercises

other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you tend to do more, less, or the same amount of the above activities during Christmas?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Be prepared to discuss how Christmas would change if you did more of them.

## **CHILDREN**

You can skip this page of the inventory if children are not an important part of your celebration.

1. Write down each of your children's (or grandchildren's) names and briefly describe each one's attitude toward Christmas. For example:

Zoe: Delighted by the tree, loves Christmas music, was a little frightened of Santa last year...

Gabriel: Preoccupied with brand-name toys, likes to make gifts for others, enjoys playing with cousins at the reunion...

Skyler: Bored with family reunions, quite materialistic...

Name / Attitude

2. List the family activities that give your children an active role in the celebration.

3. List the family traditions that help your children understand the meaning of Christmas.

## **CHARITY**

1. Examine the following list and cross out those charitable activities that you did not take part in last Christmas and add any that you participated in that we did not include.

Donations to charities

Volunteer work (list)

Time spent with lonely people or shut-ins

Special favors for family and/or friends

Contributions to world peace

Buying holiday gifts/cards from charitable organizations

Other

2. Put an asterisk by those activities that are most meaningful to you.

(Stop here and wait for further instructions.)

If you've finished ahead of others, review this inventory and think about what you would like to talk about in the discussion period that follows. What were your main areas of stress? Which parts of your celebration seem to be working well for you? Which parts of the celebration would you like to change and why?

### **Exercise 2: Ranking Ten Christmas Values**

Assign the numbers "1" to "10" to each of these value statements. Place the number "1" beside your highest value, the number "2" beside your next highest value, and so on until you have assigned all the numbers. (Use each number only once.)

- \_\_\_ Christmas is a time to be a peacemaker, in my family and in the world at large.
- \_\_\_ Christmas is a time to spend enjoyable time with my immediate family.
- \_\_\_ Christmas is a time to reunite with my relatives.
- \_\_\_ Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of Christ.
- \_\_\_ Christmas is a time to create a festive, beautiful home environment.
- \_\_\_ Christmas is a time to show my love and generosity through gifts.
- \_\_\_ Christmas is a time to remember the poor, lonely, and needy.
- \_\_\_ Christmas is a time to be active in my church community.
- \_\_\_ Christmas is a time to celebrate with friends.
- \_\_\_ Christmas is a time to relax and be renewed.

(Stop here and wait for further instructions.)

### **Exercise 3: A Christmas Fantasy**

For this exercise write down your vision of a deeply satisfying Christmas celebration. The only requirement is that your fantasy fills you with peace and joy.

(Continue on a separate sheet of paper if necessary.  
Then stop and wait for further instructions.)

**Exercise 4: Creating a Christmas Plan**

My first goal for the coming celebration: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To make this goal a reality, I am going to:

Objective 1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Objective 2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Objective 3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My second goal for the coming celebration: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To make this goal a reality, I am going to:

Objective 1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Objective 2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Objective 3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Continue on a separate sheet of paper if necessary.)