

Suggestions

- Consider holding a quiet day on a weekday or Saturday in Advent; also a special service earlier in the autumn to raise awareness of issues relating to spending and giving over Christmas (see 'Suggestions for Talks and Sermons' at www.casc-aid.org.uk)
- Emphasise as early as possible that Christmas Day is the beginning and not the end of our Christian celebrations. Can you reschedule at least one of your usual pre-Christmas services or activities for the period after Christmas?
- In addition to any services that your church plans to hold over the two weeks following Christmas, involve your congregation in the organisation of meals, home visiting, counselling and community events during this time.
- At Epiphany, think about holding a service that may attract back those who attend Christmas services on a 'one-off' basis (e.g. with a play or event involving children). How about inviting everyone to a shared meal afterward?
- Seek to end the official Christmas period on a high note, with the joy that Jesus' presence brings to all.

See also: 'Whose Birthday are we Celebrating?' leaflet available at www.casc-aid.org.uk



A Christmas gift is for life, not just for Christmas!

From Advent to Epiphany



Ideas For Churches

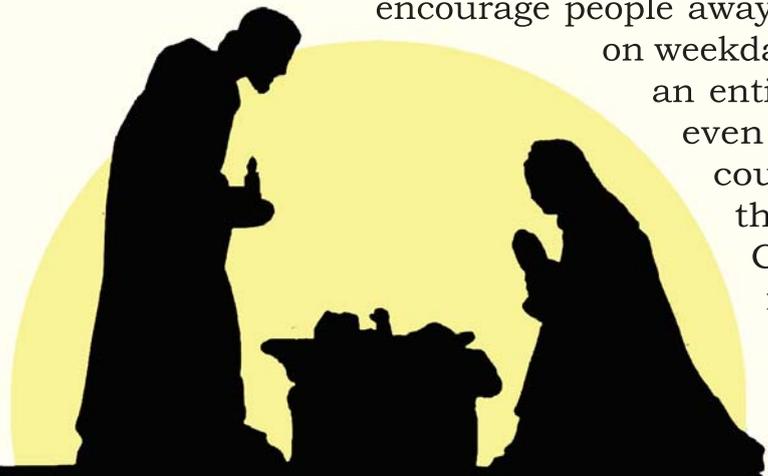
'I come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10)

CASC-aid suggests ideas to help churches and individuals enjoy Christmas more. Here are some thoughts:

Advent - a time for refreshment

Advent does not have to be a mad rush! By counting down the weeks and days left before December 25th, Christmas has become the end of the Advent season rather than the beginning of a new era, with many of our services and activities crammed into the preceding days. But if we begin our church celebrations on Christmas Day, then Advent can once again become the period of quiet reflection and spiritual preparation it was originally intended to be.

By moving some services and events to the period between Christmas and Epiphany – the traditional ‘12 Days of Christmas’ – it leaves Advent free for quieter services on Sundays. And by drawing attention to the gift of life that Christmas denotes, churches can encourage new approaches to Christmas spending and giving that may help encourage people away from the shops on weekdays too. Perhaps an entire service, in or even before Advent, could be based on the theme that ‘a Christmas gift is for life, not just for Christmas’.



Christmas - the beginning, not the end

Christ's birth is the start of the new era: one that should be filled with joy and hope. If a quieter Advent reduces the pressure before Christmas, there may be more time and energy to devote to celebrating this greatest of all birthdays. And congregations, indeed whole communities, need their churches to be open at this time. The ‘12 Days of Christmas’ could be an ideal time for a church family meal; for a carol service; for a nativity play; and for activities aimed at the wider community. And if members of your church have counselling skills, it would be an ideal time to make these known to those who are lonely, bereaved, under marital stress or in debt.

Epiphany - raise the profile!

Many modern Christians associate Epiphany with one thing only: taking down the Christmas decorations, often with relief. Yet originally it was Epiphany that was observed as a religious feast, not Christmas, to celebrate Jesus' appearance to the Gentiles. It is a day for raising the Christian profile, not turning out the lights.

Epiphany, therefore, should be celebrated in our churches as an integral part of our Christmas festivities and as an occasion that marks their **continuation**, not their **conclusion**. It can be developed as a time to begin to focus on the events in Jesus' life on earth that culminate in Easter, the greatest Christian festival of all.

Suggestions for talks and sermons are available at www.casc-aid.org.uk.