



# PARENT CONNECT

A BRIDGE BETWEEN PARENTS AND YOUTH MINISTRY

DEC 2014



## 5 SIMPLE HOLIDAY STRESS REDUCERS

1. Take a vacation day to do Christmas shopping or decorate the house.
2. Designate one portion of the holiday meal as 'pre-prepared'...buy a cooked turkey, boxed desserts, etc.
3. Create a 'blackout' day: no one is allowed to put anything on the calendar – it's family time! No Christmas parties. No errands. Nothing.
4. Assign roles: Christmas card addresser, attic climber inner, grocery shopper, gift wrapper. Give the kids specific responsibilities and ways to contribute.
5. Create 'guest free' zones: dates where you will not be traveling or visiting and where people will not be visiting you.

*Enjoy the holidays. Find the Prince of Peace in the midst of decking the halls.*

## CHRISTMAS BREAK

Merry Christmas, Mom & Dad, and care-givers!

Welcome to our first Parent Connect newsletter! It's my intention to put this together monthly to keep you updated on what we are up to at FPCC Youth, to offer some reflections, and to provide insights into youth culture.

As appropriate, I will include content from other youth writers, bloggers and anything else I think may be beneficial as we seek to be faithful to our commission to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

As we approach Christmas and the end of the year, I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the wonderful team of leaders that we have been blessed with at First Parish. As the youth pastor, I'm often the one who gets noticed, but the truth is that nothing would be possible without the commitment and dedication of the wonderful volunteers who serve alongside me. I am thankful for Tom Carpenter, Tim Callaghan, Erica Illanes, Emily Covell, Chandra Laboy and of course my beautiful bride, Kara. They all serve faithfully and with a genuine love for both the Lord and our young people. Please take the opportunity to thank

them for their service next time you see them. They are a blessing! I also want to acknowledge our church leadership and each of you for the value you put on youth ministry and the resources that are made available.

On Wednesday Dec 17 is an end of year celebration for parents and caregivers to join us for dinner. We want to celebrate the role you play and have you join in the fun we have as a youth community. We hope to see you there 6.30-8pm.

I hope the following thoughts and reflections are useful to you and support in some way with the important task you have as parents and caregivers.

Blessings to you.

By Chris Dodds

## YOUTH CULTURE

### A WORD FROM THE WORD

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9.6



## TRADITIONS WITH TEENAGERS

The world changes so fast. Some experts are predicting that culture cycles every 18 – 24 months now. What was in last year is already on its way out. And kids are begging for ‘familiar’ in this state of constant change. It’s why Christmas and other holiday traditions are so vital. Unfortunately, the older our kids get, the more difficult it becomes to incorporate traditions into our holiday routine. Their life-stage and our busy-ness sometimes becomes a road block.

But teenagers need that familiar moment now more than ever. It’s a comfortable pair of jeans that we refuse to throw out, instead patching the holes so we can keep wearing them! Consider whether your traditions simply need a make-over.

We gather all our Christmas cards at our dining room table. Once Christmas comes and goes, we pull out a card and pray for the sender each time we’re gathered at a family meal. When we began this practice, we

would cut off the front of the card and send it back to the originator as a post card, letting them know they were loved and prayed for. As our kids grew up and life got busier – we stopped sending postcards and began throwing a post on social media. Our ‘thankful journal’ took on a more digital nature the older our kids became. Our Easter egg hunts became geo-cache scavenger hunts instead of back-yard bullies with baskets.

The familiarity of those traditions doesn’t change. They simply become more millennial as our kids become more millennial. The heart and memories contained in those traditions never lose their allure – regardless of the facelift they receive. And those traditions are always a timeless ‘moment’ for our teenagers.

By Darren Sutton

### WAITING HERE FOR YOU

December is a time of expectant waiting for teenagers. School vacation. Finals. Christmas.

Capitalize on that. Build an Advent tradition in your home this Christmas – an expectant waiting for the coming of Jesus.

Resources for Advent are all over Amazon. A search on Pinterest will avail great ‘hands-on’ ways to incorporate Advent into your Christmas routine. Some churches even produce Advent family devotionals to use at home.

Why does Advent matter? Because the holidays are rushed and demanding. Sometimes we don’t even make time to remember one another – much less the Christ-child. Advent is a great way slow the hurried routine – stop – breathe – be still and know that He is God. Let Advent be that reminder to your family this Christmas.

# IN THEIR WORLD

## CHRISTMAS SOUNDTRACK

What's playing in the background of your holiday season?

On my my iPod:

One of our favorite Christmas albums is Chris Tomlin's *Glory in the Highest*. I especially love his versions of *Joy to the World* (*Unspeakable Joy*) and *O Holy Night*. The line "chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother" usually brings me to tears. May we never harden our hearts to the transforming power and truth of the gospel.

The other Christmas track I look forward to every year doesn't seem to be played here in the USA.

Go to youtube and check out *Snoopy and the Red Barron* by *The Royal Guardsmen*. It's a classic!



## CHRISTMAS MOVIES

How about using the holiday to watch a few Christmas favorites – and keep those communication lines flowing as you do!

In the comedy category, try *Elf*, starring Will Farrell as a human raised by elves and portraying his quest to find his birth-dad in NYC. Here's some conversation starters:

- What would it take for someone to be as positive as Buddy?
- Music (in this case – ‘singing loud for all to hear’) is a really powerful mood dictator. What makes music so impacting?
- Buddy finally ‘breaks’ and runs away. Tell your kids a story of a time when you felt broken and wanted to escape. How did your faith help you through this? Have they experienced anything like this?

Cartoons are rarely a miss, even with teenagers. My favorite is ‘*A Charlie Brown Christmas*’. Kara gave

it to me as a gift on my first Christmas in the States and we watch it every year. It is one of the few movies that clearly gives the true meaning of Christmas, skillfully delivered by blanket-wielding Linus!

We all feel more nostalgic than ever during Christmas. Use that to your advantage! Netflix has a giant list of modern classics and old faithfuls available on ‘watch it now’ and DVD order. Those old familiars that lots of teenagers haven’t seen yet – like “*Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*”, “*White Christmas*”, or “*It’s a Wonderful Life*” make for great discussions as you stroll down memory lane together. Or grab some modern-day classics like “*Christmas with the Kranks*” and talk about how specific people would react if your family skipped Christmas.

The truth is, weather is perfect right now to grab some hot cocoa and snuggle up on the couch next to your teenager. And they’re on vacation – so don’t let these prime moments slip by unnoticed. Be intentional about a Merry, Communicative Christmas.