# CHRISTMAS WITHOUT GIFTS

# *THE RICHNESS OF EXISTENCE*

***Rather than of having possessions***

As we are preparing ourselves for the celebration of God’s mystery of incarnation, we would like to provide you some alternative options regarding holiday gifts. It’s all about the Franciscan lifestyle and our spirituality.

## Spiritual Background

For us Franciscans, Christmas is when we celebrate the mystery of God; it’s not just a festive season. Like St. Francis, who celebrated the mystery of the Incarnation in Greccio, Italy, we also commemorate that God who, in the Word made flesh, has saved the world. The mystery of how God chose to be born in poverty in Bethlehem is the source of Franciscan joy at Christmas. So, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, we would like to share a few suggestions with you.

## Objectives

## The joy of giving and receiving gifts is something special; the giver and the receiver both share in that joy. But buying lots of holiday gifts can become a real financial burden, and can clutter our lives with an overload of non-essentials. There are alternatives to this, however, and an increasing number of people are choosing not to buy gifts for the holidays, and instead to spend the Christmas season differently. Many of these people are neither Franciscan nor Christian and they choose this practice because of financial reasons, or because they want to find sustainable alternatives to this kind of spending.

## However, our objective is not purely economic. Our purpose is to witness to our alternative and counter-cultural spiritual values, focusing on the richness of existence rather than on having possessions. It is also about opting out of a system of consumerism that sells comfort and joy at the expense of the earth and of the poor. Challenging the system that produces such a loss of life and peace can begin with little daily practices. After all, the spirituality that we pursue does not become a reality if we don’t start by practising alternative values in our everyday lives.

## Suggestions

Here are some practical suggestions:

* **Give time**. For many of us, time is much more valuable than stuff. Rather than bring a gift to a party, offer to help the hostess to clean up when the night is over. Take your niece or nephew to a concert or a basketball game. Spend an afternoon going through old photos with your grandmother.
* **Give an experience**. Instead of exchanging gifts, opt for an evening out, a trip to the movies, a movie night in, dinner at home or a holiday baking party. That expensive shopping day can turn into a day spent with your parents, something that you will cherish for a long time.
* **Give to charity.** It will be a wonderful alternative to traditional gifts. You can give a charity gift card with which the recipient can choose the charity that will receive the donation. It will be more fulfilling.
* **Give up gifts.** Make it clear to friends that you are not interested in exchanging "little gifts" out of a sense of obligation. Give them the gift of freedom from that obligation to you.
* **Make do-it-yourself gifts.** Knit a sweater, make posters or DVDs with photographs of special times with friends and family, or create herb-infused cooking oils with herbs from your garden.
* **Give edible gifts.** Gourmet coffee or tea, homemade sweets, chocolates, a bottle of wine. All are likely to be more welcome than other knick-knacks. And, they won't take up space in the house for years. Instead of exchanging gifts with co-workers, bring in bagels and coffee, when the holiday sweets are long gone.
* Finally, **consider a retro gift**: a card with a heartfelt handwritten message about how much your co-worker, teacher, friend, sister or brother, really means to you. Those kinds of gifts are much rarer, and more precious, than yet another scented candle.

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