How catechists can use this activity guide

This guide is designed to be used alongside the U.S. Council Catholic Bishops’ Liturgical Calendar. The “Scripture Meditations and Reflection” section is based on Sunday Mass Readings throughout the four weeks of Advent that culminate in the celebration of Christmas. Some of the activities, such as the “Verse to Memorize,” can be encouraged as a family activity. You can also urge students and parents to join together to fundraise on behalf of low-income Haitian families.

We encourage you to be creative in your use of this guide, incorporating your own ideas to enrich your experience. When you do, upload your photos to social media using the hashtag #HomesforChristmas to share your Advent experience with Cross Catholic Outreach!
To draw your children into the Advent journey, make a personalized Advent wreath to use during the next four weeks.

**Supplies:**

Green construction paper or card stock, one sheet of pink paper, three sheets of purple paper, one sheet of white paper, five cardboard tubes, yellow or orange tissue paper, scissors, one pencil, and glue or tape.

**Instructions:**

1. Have your children trace their hands on the green construction paper. Once the tracing is complete, cut out each handprint. Repeat this process until each student has enough hands to form the shape of a wreath.
2. Glue or tape the paper hands together in a circle, making the wreath.
3. Using glue or tape, wrap three cardboard tubes in purple construction paper, one in pink and a longer one in white.
4. These tubes represent the Advent candles. Place the colored “candles” on the wreath, with the white candle in the center. Each week, fill each tube with yellow or orange tissue paper, to represent the lighting of the candles.

**Supplies you’ll need throughout the Advent season:**

**Week 1:** Small cardboard box (such as an empty tissue box) or empty container (such as a milk carton), wrapping paper, tape, scissors.

**Week 2:** Wrapping paper, tape, scissors.

**Week 3:** Supplies to bake and decorate Christmas cookies and plastic bags to distribute them to customers.

**Week 4:** Markers, crayons, colored pencils and other graphic tools to decorate your children’s cookbook (before it is photocopied).

**Epiphany Week:** Supplies to construct a paper crown. If your parish allows it, bring cupcakes and share a traditional “King’s Cake” with your class. Present the king with a crown and a little gift.
Fundraising Idea: Collection Boxes

Since much of the campaign will involve fundraising, Cross Catholic Outreach has free-of-charge collection boxes available upon request, which can be used to collect money raised during the week. Children can also make their own collection boxes.

First, take a small cardboard box (such as an empty tissue box) or an empty container (such as a milk carton) and decorate it with wrapping paper like a Christmas present. Throughout December, children can take the wrapped box home and put in extra change they earn from chores, encouraging their family members to do the same. During the final week of Advent, children can bring their collection boxes as gifts to the “Happy Birthday, Jesus” party, detailed on page 6 of this guide.

Verse to Memorize

God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. ~ 1 Corinthians 1:9

The Prophecy Candle or the Candle of Hope

The first Sunday of Advent symbolizes hope with the Prophecy Candle, reminding us that Jesus is coming. Through the prophets of the Old Testament, God promised to send this Savior to rescue the people from their sins. Over 700 years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah prophesied the birth, death and resurrection of our Messiah. This first week of Advent, remind your children that Jesus is our hope.

Homelessness Fact and Prayer

Worldwide, more than 2 million people are evicted each year. Most of them are slum dwellers. ~ U.N. HABITAT, THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING

Dear Lord, we lift up all of the people in the world who don’t have a home to call their own. Provide them with a roof over their heads and peace in their hearts. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.
Haiti Fact and Prayer

Did you know that a home in Haiti can be built for $8,580. According to Federal Reserve Economic Research, the median sale price of a home in the United States is $321,400. For the price of one home in the United States, 37 homes can be built in Haiti!

Heavenly Father, I pray that you would give us generous hearts for those who go without safe shelter, food or clothing. Make me an example of your love, grace and kindness in this world. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Fundraising Idea: Gift Wrapping

Ask a local retail store whether your family or group can team up to run a gift-wrapping station near the establishment. For donations, offer to wrap exiting customers’ gifts — complete with ribbons, bows and gift tags. Make sure you tell them their donation will build homes for low-income families in Haiti!

Verse to Memorize

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. ~ Isaiah 40:11

The Bethlehem Candle or the Candle of Preparation

As we light the second candle, representing peace, we remember the humble living conditions into which Jesus was born. Because there was no place in Bethlehem for Mary and Joseph to lay their heads, they made their home in a stable and placed Jesus in a manger when he was born. A manger is a feeding trough for animals.

Just as our Savior was born with no comfortable place to lay his head, many children in Haiti are born into similarly difficult situations. They live in makeshift huts made of sticks, scrap plastic and mud — not nearly enough shelter to protect them from the wind, rain, scorching sun and outside world. Remind your children that this Christmas, they have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the poor.
WEEK 3

Scripture Meditations and Reflections:
Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11 • 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 • John 1:6-8; 19-28 • Psalm 3

The Shepherd Candle or the Candle of Joy

One of the greatest plot twists in the Christmas story is the announcement of Jesus’ birth — because it was delivered to humble shepherds rather than to the powerful leaders of that time. In that era, being a shepherd meant you were a member of the lowest class in society. Shepherds were the poorest of the poor, and yet God sent his heavenly messengers to deliver the good news of Christ’s birth to them! Can you imagine the joy in their hearts as they realized the magnitude of this birth announcement?

That’s how our God of love models divine compassion — he extends mercy and love to the last, least and lost. In the same way, we need to remember the people around the world who have no food to eat, no clothes to wear and no place to call home. The poorest of the poor have a special place in the heart of God. Remind your children to keep all of God’s children in their prayers.

Light the pink candle this week. It is a symbol of rejoicing!

Poverty Fact and Prayer

Did you know that Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere? 58.5% of people live below the poverty line. ~ CIA WORLD FACTBOOK

Dear God, we pray for our brothers and sisters living in Haiti as they face many struggles. May you give them comfort and peace and provide for their daily needs of food, water and shelter. Nourish them with your love and protect them with your mighty hand. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

Fundraising Idea:
Christmas Cookies to Build Homes for the Needy

Help children bake Christmas cookies and decorate them with icing. Hold a bake sale, and sell them for $1 each. Make sure you tell your customers why you’re raising money!

Verse to Memorize

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ~ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
WEEK 4

Scripture Meditations and Reflections:
2 Samuel 7:1-5; 8b-12 • Romans 16:25-27 • Luke 1:26-28 • Psalm 4

The Angel Candle or the Candle of Love

As we light the Angel Candle on the fourth Sunday of Advent, we remember the love shown to the world through the birth of Christ to the Virgin Mary. This amazing act of mercy brought about the redemption of the world. Remind children that this gift of love is too precious and wonderful to keep to ourselves; we must share it with others. When we show love to the poor, we also show love to Jesus. By giving sacrificially in the name of Christ, we show that Christ has transformed our lives and we keep sharing the heavenly host’s message of “good tidings of great joy!”

Homelessness Fact and Prayer

Worldwide, about 1.2 billion people are living in inadequate shelter ~ WORLD BANK

Dear God, we pray for the millions of homeless children around the world. We pray that you would protect them, fill their hearts with hope and demonstrate your love tangibly in their lives. We ask this in the eternal and saving name of Christ, Amen.

Fundraising Idea: Christmas Cookbook

This is a real family activity, as each child brings in a parent’s favorite holiday recipe! Compile the recipes, incorporating the “Homes for Christmas” charitable theme, and write a short introduction stressing that all proceeds from cookbook sales will go toward our brothers and sisters in Haiti. Encourage a fellow parishioner to donate the printing costs. Be creative! Let your kids add their own design ideas, and then sell each cookbook for around $5!

Verse to Memorize

I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety. ~Psalm 4:8
The roots of our modern-day Epiphany are many. The word itself comes from a Greek word that means “appearance” or “to show oneself.” As Catholics, we observe Epiphany as the day the three kings visited Jesus and acknowledged him as the savior the world had been waiting for. We know that they were scientists who studied astronomy, math and probably medicine. They were aware of the prophecies of the birth of God’s Son and the salvation that he would bring to the world. They looked for a sign of the Messiah’s birth in the stars. When the brightest star they had ever seen appeared in the sky, the kings knew that they had to follow it to find the Son of God.

**Housing Fact and Prayer**

*One eighth of the world’s population — almost 1 billion people — currently live in slums.* ~ UN HABITAT

SLUM ALMANAC

Dear Lord, we pray for all families living in an endless cycle of poverty in dangerous slum communities. Lead them out of the darkness of their misery and into the light of your love. Show them your faithful provision and unending mercy. In your name we pray, Amen.

**Fundraising Idea:**

*“Happy Birthday, Jesus” Party*

By now, the kids should have their collection boxes — their gifts for the Christ child — all ready to go. Now it’s time to have a birthday party for Jesus! This party should be the culmination of your fundraising efforts throughout Advent and Christmas. If your parish allows food celebrations, you could bring in cupcakes and share a traditional “King’s Cake” with your class. Present the king with a construction paper crown.

**Verse to Memorize**

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ~ *Matthew 2:11*
For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.

ISAIAH 25:4