

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS RESOURCES

This year's Christmas resources follow the theme of 'Reforming Society' through the lens of the historical figure of St. Nicholas. This man—who has 'evolved' into the mythical figure of Santa Claus—was a sincere follower of Christ and a bishop in his community. He stood up for the truth and acted against the false worship of idols. He lobbied government to change oppressive policy and stood up for the innocent. He gave to the poor and provided food for people during famine. He was, in his fourth century Turkish context, a reformer of society. I wonder what we can learn today from his example.

Given the political nature of the topic and the awareness that some families choose to believe in and celebrate Santa while there are others who choose not to follow that tradition, we have tried to provide resources that will sit comfortably with both. Within the theme we have focused on St. Nicholas, his cause and ministry and how that ties in with how children and families can use his example as well as Jesus' example of reaching out to those in the community in need during the Advent season.

Please understand that you can make changes to suit your participants due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

Below you will find a list of interactive messages and activities that can be used alongside the resources that have been provided for your corps to use during the Advent season. There is a variety of activities that will connect with a range of ages of children, or activities that can be adapted to fit either a younger or older audience. You might like to use this material and resources in Kids Church, Kids Club, at a park event you are putting on during the Christmas season, at any programs that you might run during the week, a family service, or as interactive messages within your church services.

You have been provided with five interactive messages and four activities as well as 'Home & Beyond' activities to help resource and encourage families to continue the conversation around this theme at home. You may like to use the interactive messages during a kids spot in your service and then link it to one of the activities during your Kids Church, or you might like to use the interactive message on its own or just use some of the activities during Kids Church. The resources are yours to choose from and fit into your space.

The 'Home & Beyond' gift tags can be used each week to give to families as an extension to what they have learnt and explored during the messages or activities. You are encouraged to give these out to all families connected with your church to help equip them to engage in conversation and activities around the theme throughout Advent.

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Cut me in half

REFORMING SOCIETY – WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTION TO SAINT NICHOLAS

INTERACTIVE MESSAGE 1 – WHO IS SAINT NICHOLAS?

For this message you will need:

- Bags of gold coins (chocolate ones will do, the more the better) displayed in a way that can be seen by all the congregation.

'Wow, look at all this gold. Hmm, gold reminds me of something at Christmas time but I can't remember what it is. Anybody know?' (*Hopefully someone will mention the present of gold to Jesus.*)

'Oh, that's right, the wise men gave Jesus some gold as a gift when he was born.'

'Well, I certainly have a lot of money here. (*Tip your money out into a clear plastic container so that they can see how much money there is.*) Hmm, just imagine what that sort of money could buy me. Maybe a new car, a new book, or the game I have been saving up for. Maybe I could go on a nice big holiday. Oh, imagine how many toys I could buy with this money. Oh, and all the chocolate and lollies I could buy. Yep, there sure is a lot of money here. Money, money, money.' (*Run your hands through the money as you say this.*)

'Who would love to share some of this money with me? Oh, that's far too many people; I don't think I can do that so I'm just going to keep it all for myself. Is that okay? Oh, I can see that you are not too happy about that decision. Okay, because I love Jesus and I know that he would want me to share what I have with those of you that may need it I will give you some later on.'

'You know, this actually reminds me of something else that I think about when I think about gold and Christmas time. It reminds me about a man who lived a long time ago and his name was Saint Nicholas.'

'Does that name sound familiar to any of you? Maybe you know who Saint Nicholas is already. (*Hopefully someone will say Santa.*) 'You know I'm glad someone said Santa Claus, because the word 'Santa' comes from the word 'Saint' and the word 'Claus' is a shorter version of '**Nicholas**' [cholas/claus]. So Santa Claus sort of grew out of the story of Saint Nicholas. We are going to learn more about that over the next few weeks. By the way, can anyone laugh like Santa Claus? (*Give them a moment to try.*)'

'Saint Nicholas was born in the fourth century (hundreds of years ago) and was known as Bishop Nicholas of Myra which is a town in modern day Turkey. Has anyone been to Turkey? (*Wait for responses.*) I wonder if anyone knows what a bishop is. (*Wait for responses.*)'

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'Well, a bishop is like a Divisional Commander in The Salvation Army today. Bishop Nicholas, who became known as Saint Nicholas, was in charge of a number of churches in a specific area. He was a passionate follower of Jesus, and because he loved Jesus so much he was appointed to the role of bishop when he was very young.

'There was also something else that happened to St. Nick when he was very young—his mum and dad died and they left behind a lot of money for him. He had so much money that he chose to give money away to people in his community that needed it. He would give away gold coins to help families that needed food, he gave gold coins away to children and parents who needed to buy new shoes and clothing *(as you say this hold some of the gold coins up to show everyone)*. He did all of these wonderful things in secret: nobody knew that it was Saint Nick giving away his money to help people who were desperate for help.

(Pick a child.) 'You know, these are really coins made of chocolate and I can see some grown-ups who look like they're in desperate need of some chocolate. Can you go and give these five coins to five people who look most desperate.' *(Give the child a minute to dispense the coins.)*

'Saint Nick also did other great things for the people in his community. Not only did he help them with money but he talked to the government about changing some of the laws of the time that would make it easier for people to live comfortably. He didn't just feel compassion for people, he stepped up to do something about it.

'There was something else special about St Nicholas. He loved Jesus and he followed the example of how Jesus treated the poor and needy in the community. He didn't just help people because he felt sorry for them; he helped people because he loved Jesus and he knew that this is how Jesus would want him to treat others. Wow, isn't that great that St. Nick would help people in this way.

'In the Bible in Luke 4 verses 18–19 it talks about Jesus and says, "The Lord's Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers."

'As disciples and friends of Jesus we are asked to carry on the work of Jesus, so over the next few weeks we are going to explore some ways we can help people in our families or community because we know this is what Jesus would love us to do.'

Give out the coins to remind the congregation to think about how they could help others this Christmas.

ACTIVITY 1 – TREASURE HUNT

For this activity you will need the following supplies:

- Small circles that may look like coins (yellow or gold) cut out of thick paper
- Small snack plastic zip lock bags
- Chocolate frogs (enough for each person in the group)

'Who loves a treasure hunt? I am going to give you all a plastic zip lock bag in which to collect some treasure. I have hidden lots and lots of paper gold coins around the room *(show them an example of what they are looking for)*. When I count to three you can go on a treasure hunt and find as many gold coins as you can and see if you can fill up your zip lock bag. One, two, three go.'

- When everyone is finished, ask the children to hold onto their coins.
- On a table, place enough chocolate frogs for each child.

'Now, on the table I have some chocolate frogs that you can buy with your gold coins. The chocolate frogs are 10 gold coins each but I know some of you have only found a few coins. Mmm, that might be a little tricky. I wonder what we could do about that so that no one misses out. *(Allow the children to make some suggestions before helping them to come to a conclusion.)*

'I wonder if the children who have found lots of coins would be willing to give their coins to someone who really needed them. This may mean that you may not be able to buy as many chocolate frogs for yourself. Or perhaps someone with a lot of coins could buy an extra frog for someone who does not have enough coins. *(Encourage the children to share the gold coins around so that every child can buy a chocolate frog.)*

Link: 'I wonder if you found it difficult to give up something for someone else even though you know they needed your help. It can be difficult sometimes, and lots of us can struggle with this. It may mean that we miss out on something or have to give up something in order to help someone else.'

'For those children who shared their gold coins, I wonder how you felt helping one of your friends. *(Wait for responses.)*

'What about those that were helped by someone else—I wonder how you felt. *(Wait for responses.)*

'Jesus wants us to help not only our friends but also others around us who need help, especially those who have way less than we do. He doesn't want us to only be thinking of ourselves and keep all that we have. He would love to see us sharing what we have and what we can do for other people.'

- 4 Pray together as a group that Jesus would help the children share what they

have and what they can do with others who may need some help.

At the end of the session give out the paper gold coins evenly to all the families in their zip lock bags so that they can be used for their 'Home & Beyond' activity. Hand out the 'Home & Beyond' activity card along with these coins.

HOME & BEYOND

Secret good deeds...

As a family, discuss the idea of doing good deeds in secret.

- I wonder how doing secret good deeds for someone would make you feel.
- I wonder how doing secret good deeds would make the person you are doing it for feel.
- I wonder if there are some good deeds that you could do at home, school, work or church this week.
- Hang a stocking next to a container with some paper 'gold coins'. Every time somebody in the family does a secret good deed, a gold coin is put into the stocking. Deeds may be counted and reported to the family each day or at the end of the week.

REFORMING SOCIETY – WEEK 2 – HOW SAINT NICHOLAS USED HIS GIFTS AND POSITION FOR TRUTH

INTERACTIVE MESSAGE 2 – SAINT NICHOLAS AND HIS GIFTS

For this message you will need:

- A couple of bottles of perfume and after-shave lotion.
- Three boxes wrapped up in Christmas paper. In one box you will have a musical instrument. In another box you will have some cooking utensils and in the last box you will have some red heart-shaped chocolates. You will need the items that you use to coincide with the talents/gifts of some people from within your church, so make sure that you choose appropriately. You will need to choose one volunteer that can play a musical instrument and one that is good at cooking. You might like to have an idea of some people you can use along with some backups if needed. You can pick other gifts to match some very specific skills of those in your congregation if you choose, but you'll also need to change the information below.

'Wow, what is that smell? Can you smell that? I wonder who likes perfume or after-shave lotion.' *(Take out your perfume and after-shave samples from a bag and gently spray some in the air.)*

'These smells remind me of a gift that Jesus received from the wise men when he was born. Can anyone tell me what it was called?' *(Wait for responses.)* Frankincense, that is right. I wonder if you know why the wise men would have given this gift of smelly stuff to Jesus. I mean, he was a baby and I don't usually give a baby the gift of perfume or after-shave lotion when they are born, I would usually give them a rattle or a special teddy bear. So I wonder why you think the wise men gave Jesus perfume. *(Allow some time for a couple of responses but don't spend too much time on this.)*

'In olden days—and still today in some churches—frankincense is used in worship and we are called to worship Jesus, so this gift makes sense. One of the best ways of worshipping Jesus is by showing Jesus' love through our actions; this might mean helping others when they need it, just like Saint Nicholas did—do you remember what we learnt last time about Saint Nicholas. *(Wait for responses.)*

'Last week we were introduced to Saint Nicholas, who was appointed to the role of bishop—an important role in some churches—when he was very young, and remember his mum and dad died and they left behind a lot of money for him. He chose to give that money away to people in his community that needed it. He would give away gold coins to help families that needed food and he gave gold coins to children and parents who needed to buy new shoes and clothing. He did all of these wonderful things in secret. Nobody knew that it was Saint Nick giving away his money to help people.

'Saint Nicholas loved Jesus and he followed the example of how Jesus treated the poor and needy in the community. He didn't just help people because he felt sorry for them. He helped people because he loved Jesus and he knew that if Jesus was there he would do the same for these people. Wow, isn't it great that Saint Nick would help people in this way? It wasn't about him but about helping others in need.

'Saint Nick was also very skilled at talking and communicating to others—lots of us might be good at talking but are we good at communicating important things? Well, he was able to talk to the government about changing some of the laws at the time to make it easier for people to live more comfortably. Saint Nick used his 'skills' or what we sometimes refer to as 'gifts' and 'talents' to help people in the community.

'I am going to choose a couple of people to help me today.' *(Call out the two volunteers you have thought about in preparation for your message.)*

'It's Christmas and I have three gifts here, and I would love to give you a gift'. *(Hand over the first gift, with the musical instrument in it, to the person who loves to cook. Ask them to open it.)*

'Wow, a mouth organ *(xylophone or recorder or whatever instrument it is)*. I didn't know you could play that instrument.' *(Hopefully, they will confess that they can't.)*
'Oh that's a bit awkward; I don't think you have the gift or talent of playing a musical instrument. Hmm, sorry about that.'

(Give the second volunteer the gift with the cooking utensils in it.) 'Wow, I didn't know you liked to cook.

(Hopefully, they will confess that they don't like to cook.) Oh no, well that is a bit of a wasted gift for you, too.

'Okay, well we have one last gift to open. Perhaps you can open it together and hopefully it will be a better gift for you both.' *(They open it and find a red love heart.)*

'Oh that's nice, both of you can use this. Not the chocolate (which is nice, anyway) but what it represents for us: LOVE. You can both use your gift of love to help other people. Perhaps if you swap your other gifts with each other that

might be more helpful for you, also. That's better. You now have gifts that match your skills and gifts that you can share with other people in the community just like St. Nick used and shared his gift of speaking for the benefit of others.

'It's important that we use the gifts and talents God has given us to help and encourage people within our family, church and community. Remember that the gift of frankincense the wise men gave Jesus represents worship, and one of the best ways of worshipping Jesus is by showing his love to others by our actions and helping those in need, just like Saint Nicholas did. So every time you hear that frankincense was given to Jesus, I wonder if you can remember that you too can worship Jesus by helping other people and showing them God's love.'

ACTIVITY TWO – ACTS OF RANDOM KINDNESS (ARK)

For this activity you will need:

- Red love-heart tags that can be hung from a Christmas tree
- A Christmas tree, not decorated
- Large red cardboard love-heart
- Textas

Talk to the children about a time when they may have received an 'Act of Random Kindness' from a friend or maybe even somebody they didn't know. *(You might need to give an example of what an Act of Random Kindness is and how you might have been on the receiving end of one.)* Encourage some discussion about this and particularly about how it made them feel. If you have access to a computer, you might like to show a clip about an Act of Random Kindness. If you search on YouTube you will come across quite a few appropriate examples you could use.

'I wonder what we might be able to do for someone else.'

As a group, brainstorm some ways that you could help a friend or do something nice for someone in the community. It could be as simple as opening a door for a teacher or helping someone carry their shopping etc. Write suggestions on a piece of red cardboard that is cut out into the shape of a red love-heart. When you have finished, Blu-Tak the heart onto the wall that is near the Christmas tree you will use for the rest of this activity.

On the small red love-heart tags, encourage the children to write names of friends or people in their community that they know they could help by an 'ARK' during Christmas time.

Spend some time together praying for those names, as the children hang their love-hearts on the tree.

Hand out the 'Home & Beyond' cards, at least one per family.

HOME & BEYOND

Acts of Random Kindness...

Your challenge this week (should you choose to accept it) is to show some Acts of Random Kindness within your own family. You might like to place everyone's name into a hat and have each person draw out a name and don't show anyone. They then get to do an Act of Random Kindness towards the person they have picked. Remember, it must be done in secret, without the other person knowing who did it. At the end of the week, discuss how you went with the challenge.

REFORMING SOCIETY – WEEK 3 – GIFTS AND TALENTS

INTERACTIVE MESSAGE 3 – WHAT ARE OUR GIFTS AND TALENTS?

For this message you will need:

- Lots of medium-sized boxes wrapped nicely with bows and ribbons or Christmas gift bags. Inside each box or bag place a label with a different gift or talent, i.e. singing, dancing, encouragement, cooking, talking and listening, photography, kindness, playing an instrument, writing poetry, teaching, acting, sport, art, sewing, making people laugh, leadership, serving, problem solving etc.
- A Christmas tree
- Christmas tags with a hanging loop (for the congregation to hang on their tree at home)
- Some Christmas music

'Wow, look at all these gifts under the tree. How exciting! I just love gifts. I wonder what's in them.

'I wonder who would like a gift today. *(Wait for hands up.)* Okay, well, I will pick a few people to come and open a gift. *(Choose enough people to come and open one gift each. Ask them to all choose a gift but not to open it until everyone has chosen one).*

'Now, on the count of three, I want you to all open your gifts and hold up your present at the same time—one, two, three. *(Everyone holds up a label.)*

'Well, I don't think that is quiet what you were expecting, was it? Let's have a look and see what was in the gifts that you have opened. *(Start reading all the gifts and talents out.)*

- I wonder if anyone can tell me what is special about the sort of gifts that we have opened today. *(Give them a moment for suggestions.)*
- These are the types of gifts that we can share with other people over Christmas time. These are our gifts or talents.

'A gift or talent is something that you are good at *(choose an example with someone in the congregation, 'We all know Jane is a really gifted...')*. Sometimes it is hard to know what your gifts/talents are. It is usually something that you enjoy doing or are really passionate or excited about doing, or want to share with other people.'*(Again choose an example of someone from the congregation that gets excited about sharing a gift they have.)*

'There is a verse in the Bible that talks about everyone having special gifts. I wonder if you have read it before. In 1 Corinthians 12:4 it says: 'There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but they all come from the same Spirit. There are different ways to serve the same Lord, and we can each do different things. Yet the same God works in all of us and helps us in everything we do.'

'Don't you think it is great to know that everyone has been given a special gift to share with other people?

'Over the past few weeks we have been exploring a person called St. Nicholas. He used his gifts in a special way and helped a lot of different people within his community who needed money. Back in St. Nick's day, people would leave their shoes outside on the doorstep at night. If St. Nick knew that someone in particular needed some money he would fill their shoes up with gold coins or food that would help families who were poor, sick or suffering in some kind of way. Imagine waking up and going outside to put your shoes on and finding gold coins or food in your shoes—I'm not sure it would be good to put food in everyone's shoes, have you smelt all the shoes in your family? St. Nick always did this in secret and nobody knew that it was him helping them.

'Now, not everyone here has lots of money to give away but we all have a special gift or talent that we could share with our friends and people in our community.

- I wonder what gift or talent you have that you could share with someone this Christmas.

'Maybe it could be the gift of entertainment. You may like to sing or dance or play a musical instrument and perhaps you could go and visit someone and share your talent with them to help them feel more joyful around Christmas.

'Maybe your gift or talent is that you love to garden. There may be a person who lives near you who could benefit from your gardening skills. You may wish to go and weed their garden or mow their lawn for them. Or if it's cooking, you could make a special Christmas treat to give someone.

'Maybe your gift is talking and listening to people. There are many people who are very lonely and who would love to have a conversation with you over Christmas, either in person or on the phone. Maybe you could share the story of the birth of Jesus with someone.

'In a moment you will receive a gift card and pen. Turn to a couple of people next to you (*encourage multi-generational connections and conversations*) and explore what you think you might be able to share with someone else this Christmas, remember it doesn't have to be a gift you buy in a shop. As some music plays I would like you to write on your gift card, a gift or talent you have or something that you enjoy to do and you think you could share with someone this Christmas. (*Play some appropriate Christmas music and give them a moment.*)

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Cut me in half

'I would love you to take the card home and hang it on your Christmas tree or somewhere at home as a reminder that this is your gift/talent that you wish to use this Christmas to help someone and show God's love this Christmas season.'

ACTIVITY – LET'S PLAY

For this activity you will need:

- A variety of activities that the children in your church/program like to do. See some examples below.

'You will need to take your shoes off for this/these games, just leave them outside the door so that they don't get in the way.' (*While the children are playing the game arrange for someone within the corps to place some gold chocolate coins in the children's shoes as a surprise. Attach the 'Home and Beyond' activity card to the gold coins.*)

Have a variety of activities available for the children to engage with. Try and think of the activities the children in your church like to do, i.e. basketball, dancing, chess, cricket, singing, games like duck duck goose, scarecrow tiggy, fruit salad etc. and have those activities set up ready for them to participate in.

LINK:

'Wow, wasn't it great to play together today and enjoys a bunch of activities that we love to do. I am curious; did you try something new today that you had never tried before?

'We are so fortunate to have many talented children here within our group. I wonder if you think you could share with us one of the activities that you selected earlier to do with someone outside our church to help them feel included and a bit happier this Christmas. (*Wait for some comments.*)

'Jesus gave us our gifts and talents and he wants us to enjoy using them not only for ourselves but also to share with other people. He loves seeing us have fun and loves it when we can use our talents or gifts to show our friends how much we love him. So maybe this week you could share your talent or something that you love to do with someone else.'

Pray together as a group. Encourage the children to thank God for one thing that they love to do and pray that each child would have an opportunity to share what they enjoy doing with a friend or someone outside the church.

Ask them to go outside and put their shoes back on. Watch their faces as they receive their surprises in their shoes.

12 (*If you have not used the interactive message during church, it is important that you*

go through what Saint Nicholas used to do with people's shoes when he knew they were in need.)

HOME & BEYOND

Shopping Time...

- As a family, go shopping, choose and purchase a can of food each that could be used to give to another family within the community that may need it this Christmas.
- Talk together about the importance of giving to others in need. I wonder if you can find a Bible verse about that.
- Bring the cans of food to church next week for the special children's activity.

REFORMING SOCIETY – WEEK 4 – PRACTICAL SUPPORT FOR THE POOR AND DISADVANTAGED

MESSAGE 4 – PRACTICAL SUPPORT

For this message you will need:

- Two empty Christmas stockings (the same size)
- 10 bags of gold coins
- Four volunteers
- Three different stockings for the illustration

'Today, we are going to have a competition. I need four volunteers who are good at throwing an item into a container or target.'

Two of your volunteers will be holding the empty stockings open for the other volunteers who will stand a few metres away. Make a bit of a fuss about the stockings and the excitement that comes when it is time to hang the stockings or put them out ready for Christmas Eve.

Give the two volunteers five bags of coins each and ask the first volunteer to throw their bags of coins into the stocking being held at the other end. For each bag that lands into the stocking, ask the volunteer to take one step back before throwing the next bag of coins to make it a little bit harder. Ask the second volunteer to complete the same activity. Thank them for participating and give the winner one of the stockings filled with some coins.

'I wonder how many people here hang Christmas stockings up or place them out on Christmas Eve expecting to wake up on Christmas morning with some special goodies inside. I am also curious to know if anyone here knows why we hang Christmas stockings up or place them out on Christmas Eve for our gifts.'

'Well, let's see if today's story about St. Nicholas answers any questions we have about Christmas stockings. There is a story about St. Nick that I think is one of the most important things he did.'

'St. Nick had heard of a family that had three daughters. *(Ask three volunteers of various ages to come and hold three different stockings to help with this illustration.)* Now, this family was very poor and did not have enough money to provide for their daughters to meet and marry nice husbands. In some countries, a father needs to provide a dowry for his daughters. This means that they must give the daughter's husband's family some money or something of worth when she marries her husband.'

'Back in St. Nick's day, if you did not have enough money for your daughter's dowry, the daughter had to leave the family and would be sold as a servant.

'One night, St. Nick came in secret and tossed a bag of gold into the house. It flew in through an open window, landing in a stocking (a big sock) left before the fire to dry. *(Toss one of the leftover bags of gold chocolate coins into one of the stockings that is being held by your volunteers.)* Imagine the excitement in the morning when the family came out and the gift of gold was discovered! The first daughter soon got married because she now had her dowry. *(Ask one of the volunteers to go and sit down.)*

'Not long after, another bag of gold again mysteriously appeared. *(Toss another one of the left over bags of gold chocolate coins into one of the stockings that is being held by your volunteers.)* The second daughter was also able to get married because she, too, had a dowry. *(Have the second volunteer go and sit down.)* The father, now very curious to know who the secret giver was, decided to keep watch during the night.'

'A little while later, a third bag of gold landed inside the house *(toss another one of the left over bags of gold chocolate coins into the final stockings being held by the volunteers)* and the watchful father leaped up and caught the secret gift-giver sneaking from the house. "Ah, Nicholas, it is you!" cried the father, "You have saved my daughters from being sold as servants." *(Have the final volunteer go and sit down.)*

'Nicholas, embarrassed, and not wishing to be known that it was he who was giving the family the gold gifts, begged the father to keep his secret. St. Nick said, "You must thank God alone for providing these gifts in answer to your prayers for your daughter's freedom."

'St. Nick didn't want people to know that he was the kind person who helped this family. He wanted God to be the one to get all the acknowledgment. Sometimes we can't always do good deeds for people in secret, sometimes it is just not possible, but that does not mean that we are not showing the love of Jesus through our good deeds. '

'Isn't it interesting that when St. Nick tossed the first bag of gold coins through the window, it landed in a stocking. Wow, this is why we now hang our stockings up to receive our gifts. So on Christmas morning, when you look in your stockings or under your tree at your gifts, I wonder if you will remember that there are many children and people in our community who we could share our gifts with—just like St. Nicholas did, sharing something that was really needed.

'We all love to receive and give gifts at Christmas but it doesn't always have to be physical gifts that you can wrap in a box. It can be our gifts, skills and talents—things that we can do or things that we can say. Last week we thought about some of these gifts and talents and wrote them on gift tags to hang on our tree.

I wonder if you have had an opportunity yet to share your gift or talent with someone this Christmas season.

'Christmas is a great time to share our gifts and talents, because people are more ready to receive gifts during the Christmas season. As followers of Jesus, we have been chosen to help those in our community who need our help—this is a way of giving a gift or blessing someone this Christmas.

'So this Christmas, think of your special gift or talent and think about how you could perhaps share it with someone you know who could do with some extra happiness in their lives.'

ACTIVITY - BUILDING A COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS TREE

For this activity you will need:

- The cans of food that families have brought to donate to those in the community.
- Some extra cans of food for the children who have forgotten to bring one.
- Stickers/labels that say—"This food has been given to you out of love by Salvation Army. Always remember that you are loved."—or something similar that is suitable.

'Thank you for bringing all this food along today that can be given out to people in our community who are in need. I have made some stickers we can put on the cans so that people will know they are loved.'

- Spend some time sticking the labels on the cans.

'Today we are going to build a special Christmas tree. We are going to build it with all the cans we have brought today to give to families in the community who need some extra help.'

Start building the tree one can at a time and, while you are building, talk to the children about how much our help can encourage and build up other people's lives. Talk about the importance of letting people know how much they are loved by us and by Jesus. It would be good to encourage the children to imagine what it might be like at Christmas to not have certain things, and then pray for those who will receive this food.

Take some photos of the 'can Christmas tree' to share with the whole church and to remember how they have made a difference this Christmas. Print these off and then send them out with the following 'Home & Beyond' card to help finish the Advent series.

HOME & BEYOND

Can Christmas tree...

- Have a look together at the Christmas tree you made out of cans this week.
- It is not only at Christmas time that people need us to help, support and encourage them. I wonder, as a family, how you might make a difference for others in the New Year. Maybe you could come up with a New Year's resolution to challenge you all as a family. MERRY CHRISTMAS!

'The Scriptures say, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind." They also say, "Love your neighbours as much as you love yourself."

REFORMING SOCIETY – CHRISTMAS DAY – WHAT CAN WE GIVE JESUS?

For many churches in their Christmas Day service, there is a tradition that the children will bring in one present they have received that morning and share it with everyone. It is important that this is announced the week before so that the children can participate in this special time with the rest of the congregation.

'Merry Christmas, everyone. I am so excited today as it is the day that we celebrate Jesus' birthday and we have all come to together to do that today. I wonder if the children that would like to share a gift that they have received this Christmas would like to come out the front.

'Wow, you have certainly all received some really cool and exciting things and I am sure you are going to have a great time playing, using or wearing all those things.

'Over the past few weeks we have been talking about sharing a gift or talent or possession with a friend or someone in the community. I am wondering if anyone here would like to tell us something they may have done for someone else or the way that they might have helped someone during this Christmas period. Maybe you were able to do this for a family member or a friend or perhaps someone within the local community.'

Wait for some answers (*hopefully there will be some!*). Celebrate the responses together.

'Well, today, as we think about all that Jesus has given to us, I would like us to think about what we might give to Jesus for his birthday.

- I wonder if you think he needs a new toy.
- I wonder if he would like a book or a ball or some new clothes.
- I know we can't really give him those sorts of gifts but I wonder what sorts of things Jesus would love us to give him. (Allow some time for suggestions, hopefully including 'our love'.)

'That's right, Jesus would be so excited with our love—our love of him and our love of others. That is the very best gift that we could give him and he would love to receive it. We don't need to wrap our love up in fancy paper and bows, we just need to say, "Jesus, here I am and I love you; that is my gift to you this Christmas."

'So maybe today when you sit down with your family and friends for a yummy Christmas lunch, you may wish to say a prayer together and have the opportunity for each of you to say, 'I love you Jesus—and that is my gift for you today. Happy birthday, Jesus!'

SECRET GOOD DEEDS...

As a family, discuss the idea of doing good deeds in secret.

- ★ I wonder how doing secret good deeds for someone would make you feel.
- ★ I wonder how doing secret good deeds would make the person you are doing it for feel.
- ★ I wonder if there are some good deeds that you could do at home, school, work or church this week.
- ★ Hang a stocking next to a container with some paper 'gold coins'. Every time somebody in the family does a secret good deed, a gold coin is put into the stocking. Deeds may be counted and reported to the family each day or at the end of the week.

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ACTS OF RANDOM KINDNESS...

Your challenge this week (should you choose to accept it) is to show some Acts of Random Kindness within your own family. You might like to place everyone's name into a hat and have each person draw out a name and don't show anyone. They then get to do an Act of Random Kindness towards the person they have picked. Remember, it must be done in secret, without the other person knowing who did it. At the end of the week, discuss how you went with the challenge.

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SHOPPING TIME...

- ★ As a family, go shopping, choose and purchase a can of food each that could be used to give to another family within the community that may need it this Christmas.
- ★ Talk together about the importance of giving to others in need. I wonder if you can find a Bible verse about that.
- ★ Bring the cans of food to church next week for the special children's activity.

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CAN CHRISTMAS TREE...

- ★ Have a look together at the Christmas tree you made out of cans this week.
- ★ It is not only at Christmas time that people need us to help, support and encourage them. I wonder, as a family, how you might make a difference for others in the New Year. Maybe you could come up with a New Year's resolution to challenge you all as a family. MERRY CHRISTMAS!

'The Scriptures say, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind." They also say, "Love your neighbours as much as you love yourself."

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