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Begin a faithful intention

Many people make New Year's Resolutions to lose weight or give up an unhealthy habit. Consider a faithful intention this year to help you grow in your spiritual life. Rather than waiting until January 1 to begin, start during the Christmas season.

Be a person of peace

We may not be able to do much to promote world peace, but we have the power to make the world around us more peaceful. Spend the twelve days of Christmas practicing ways you can eliminate harsh words, anger, and other negative attitudes from your life.

In Brief

Bishop Mark J. Webb's Christmas message is available

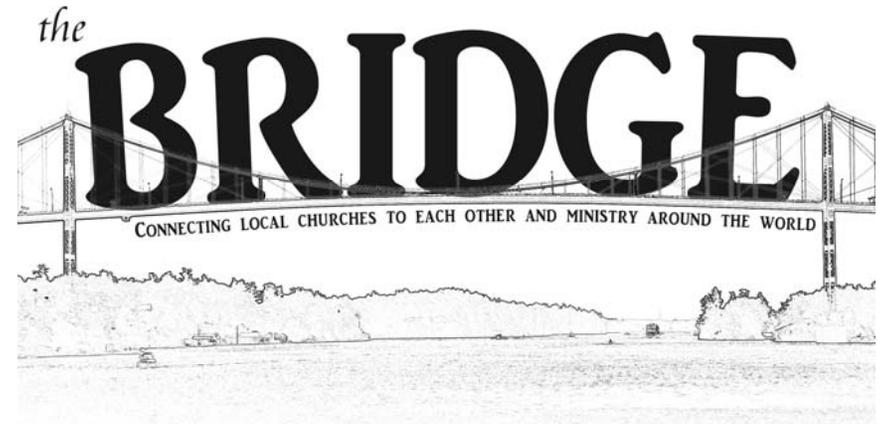


Bishop Webb shared a message for the Christmas season—his message is about the importance of hope. He encourages all to lean into hope—to expect with confidence or to cherish a desire with anticipation. As an example of hope, he points to the fact that the shepherds journeyed straight to Bethlehem after hearing of the birth of Jesus. In this day and age, in this culture, Bishop Webb explains, “we need to hear afresh the announcement of the angel – ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” Visit <https://vimeo.com/195458710> to watch a video of Bishop Webb's inspiring Christmas message.

*The **Bridge** is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world.*

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The next issue of the Bridge will be available the week before the 3rd Sunday of January. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

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12 ideas for the 12 days of Christmas

By Joe Iovino, UMC.org

After months of planning and anticipation, Christmas appears to be over all too quickly. On December 26, retailers tell us we are in the *after*-Christmas season of returns, exchanges, and more sales. The church calendar however, tells us it is still Christmas.

The twelve days we sing about in that crazy song, are a real season, sometimes called Christmastide or the days after Christmas. During this season, we continue to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Word of God made flesh who made his home among us (John 1:14 CEB).

To help celebrate the season, here are 12 creative, simple ideas that have nothing to do with partridges or lords-a-leaping.

Have a silent night

One evening, turn off everything electronic and share Christmas memories. Go

through old photos. Watch family movies (you might need to turn on the television for that). Ask others to tell of their favorite family Christmas tradition, and a joy-filled memory of a Christmas past. Spend a few moments talking about the Christmas story and the characters with whom you most relate.

Sing the songs of Christmas

We sing many Christmas carols without thinking much about the words. Take some time to research the lyrics of songs as you sing them. Where is the author biblically accurate? Where did she or he take poetic license? This is a great way to learn the biblical accounts of the Christmas story and some of the symbolism used.

Remember the refugees

One of the crises in our world this year is the number of refugees risking their lives to leave war-torn nations to find places of

safety and peace. If a church or another organization in your area is sponsoring refugees, like this United Methodist congregation, find out how you can help. Offer your support and prayers.

Additionally, make efforts to be a person of radical hospitality by welcoming the stranger, giving food to the hungry, visiting church members who do not get out, and opening your home to family and friends who are alone.

Don't return—give

Rather than returning the ugly sweater you'll never wear or the kitchen gadget you'll never use, give it away! Many places and individuals will benefit from those unwanted items. The sweater will keep someone warm, and the gadget will be sold in a secondhand store to generate funds for a ministry.

Pray through your un-decorating

As you put away the Christmas decorations, consider the symbols of the tree and evergreens, the nativity, the wreath, and more. Pray that those these signs may get packed away for 11 months, the spirit of Christ will continue to be alive in you throughout the year ahead.

Travel by a different route

The Christmas story contains several journeys—Mary visits Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph travel to be taxed, the Wise Men follow the star to Bethlehem, and Jesus and his family move to Egypt when King Herod orders the slaughter of baby boys. Many of us go on special journeys over Christmas, in addition to the time we spend in the car every day.

Consider traveling by a different route. Maybe that means taking the back way home from work or stopping by that roadside attraction as you return from Grand-

mother's house. Let the new journey remind you that we are to follow Jesus wherever he leads.

Have mealtime devotions

Each of the 12 days of Christmas, spend some time during a meal for family reflection. Ask questions. Share concerns. Tell stories. Give thanks. Sense the presence of Jesus among you.

Pray for the persecuted

Those of us privileged to live in places where we are free to pursue our faith sometimes forget there are people in other places whose celebrations of Christmas could come at the cost of their freedom or lives. Read about Christians being persecuted for their faith in places like Syria and Nigeria, a pastor recently imprisoned in North Korea, and others. Then take some special time to pray for them.

Record aha moments

Christmas can be a time of important moments you do not want to forget. A quiet moment with a relative may remind you of the importance of family. A worship service may give you new insight into how to live as a follower of Jesus. A frustrating experience in a store may encourage you to be more patient. Write those insights some place you can return in the weeks and months ahead for a reminder.

Plant a tree

At Christmas, we celebrate the gift of new, eternal life we have received in Christ. The evergreen trees we decorate are a symbol of everlasting life. Planting a tree or caring for the earth in another way can serve as a wonderful reminder of our call to be people who celebrate life.

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Singing and learning about the carols we sing can be a wonderful way to continue the Christmas celebrations.