

An Advent Message from the St. Charles Education Leaders



During Advent, the youth of St. Charles School, the Latino religious education youth, Atrium, elementary school religious education, On the Way, Way,

Children's Liturgy of the Word, and our parish "elders" will be reflecting on the Advent theme of: ***"Let us all our hearts prepare for Christ to come and enter there."*** During Advent, each group will be invited to create an expression of this Advent theme using a cut-out symbol of the "*posada*", a Spanish word meaning "dwelling."

Together as we wait and prepare, we will explore what is needed to create a physical dwelling—tools, foundation, frame, walls, heat, plumbing—and the hard work and care that goes into the planning, design and construction before it is safe and livable.

Within our world we will see how different dwellings and spaces meet different needs of all God's creatures. Caves, burrows, dens, nests, water, trees provide safe havens. We all share the sustaining needs of food, water, shelter and protection.

We will discuss what it means to lack dwelling—homelessness, the role of the poor in our midst, our responsibility to them, and the care of our world to sustain all life. Urban dwelling for some leaves others with "no room at the inn." We will discuss what it means to become "dwelling" for community and each other. As cold nights, shorter days, and lingering darkness fill our world, we look to dwellings of light, warmth, shelter, hospitality.

From physical dwelling, we will reflect on how we prepare for God's dwelling in us; what does it mean for God's Word to find a home in our hearts?

Together we will explore how one prepares for prayer - being open, focusing, forgiveness of past injustices, not carrying grudges - emptying thoughts of things that get in the way of grace.

We will see how a sense of security, "being home," brings peace. Yet sometimes, looking within our own family walls, we see arguments, selfishness, and conflict. Advent becomes an opportunity to build dwellings of

patience, acceptance, understanding, forgiveness, and unconditional love.

As we reflect on the Christ who asks for *posada* today, we will accept an invitation to take a tag from the Parish Advent Giving Tree and offer ourselves as dwellings of joy and care. As we share a meal of bread and wine, we will remember the physical hunger dwelling in others. During Advent at the 9am and 11am Children's Liturgy of the Word during Mass, baskets will be placed on the altar for food for the St. Charles Food Pantry. The children will be invited to place gifts of food in the baskets as they gather.

The cut-out posadas will be hung in the gym and church for the 5pm Christmas Eve liturgies and remain there for the Christmas season.

May our dwellings open doors of peace, hope and love!

Dear God,

Through many you arrive at our doorstep,

Asking for room in our hearts,

Friends and strangers visit us,

Take up our time.

Stretching our space beyond our comfort zones.

Help us to be your presence,

listening to understand,

offering forgiveness,

a refuge from harsh words.

Give us the courage to keep love burning brightly.

Despite fears that cause us to lock ourselves away.

Help us to open our doors to your surprises.

Gifts of others present new ways of seeing and being;

Opportunities to be something special—a womb, a dwelling for God,

Teach us your holy way.

Help us to know that by loving in particular,

We can do small things greatly,

Guide our feet into ways of peace

Where encircling arms give shelter from destruction and violence,

A new Advent. May your kingdom come. Amen.