Much has been said in recent times about the spiritual, social, economic and environmental impact of dominant consumerism in contemporary society. Pope John Paul II repeatedly condemned materialistic consumerism because it threatens the freedom of people to respond to the higher call of love over the lesser desire for material goods. Like Archbishop Oscar Romero, he spoke about the need to encourage an emphasis on being more rather than having more.


In their 2010 Social Justice Sunday Statement, Australia’s Bishops also identified consumerism as one of the factors contributing to increasing greed and violence in Australian society.

(See http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/, pages 4 and 10)

Advent is a time which offers us an excellent opportunity to turn over a new leaf by rejecting the values of our consumer society and by cultivating attitudes and practices which free us to be more fully human.

The activity below uses a familiar Advent ritual, the lighting of the Advent wreath, and focuses on making commitments to taking steps to turn our backs on consumerism so that we might be better prepared to welcome Emmanuel, God with us.

**ADVENT WREATH PRAYER & COMMITMENT**

**Preparing for Commitment**

Before any ritual of commitment, students will need to discuss the nature of consumerism and how it affects them and harms society. Engage students in a discussion about the many ways in which they are pressured into consuming more, how that pressure makes them feel and how consumerism harms people, society and the Earth. You can find resources to help you to guide this discussion in the Australian publication, Humphery, Kim, *Excess: Anti-Consumerism in the West*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2009 and at the US and UK websites http://www.verdant.net/society.htm and http://www.enough.org.uk/

**Preparing the Wreath**
Involving your class in preparing the wreath. Try to avoid purchasing materials as much as possible. Construct the wreath from attractive foliage and recycled materials. Try to recycle old candles. You can tell students some of the history and meaning of the Advent wreath. One source of information about this tradition may be found at http://www.churchyear.net/adventwreath.html

Conducting the Ritual
Traditionally, the candles of the wreath are progressively lit over the four Sundays in Advent and at Christmas, but school holidays preclude this, so, you may wish to perform the ritual during five successive classes near the end of the school year.

The ritual consists of the lighting of the candles, the recitation of a simple prayer and the commitment of each student to take action to change the way they live.

**FIRST CANDLE (PURPLE)**
The first candle is lit and the following prayer is read by one of the students:

*Jesus our Light,*
*we wait for you to come into our world*
*and to change our lives.*
*We will get ready for this wonderful moment*
*by trying to become more aware of God in our lives.*
*We want to draw closer to God*
*and your light shows us the way.*
*Dear Jesus, shine your light in our lives! Amen.*

A second student then reads some suggestions for change:

*We can draw closer to God by:*
- Setting aside time for prayer each day
- Taking time at the end of the day to think about how we behaved and treated people during the day
- Thanking God for what we have at meal times
- Spending time with God in a natural setting
- Reading one of the Gospel stories and thinking about its meaning

After some silent time is given for students to make their own commitment, a third student says:

*We wait for the coming of your light.*

All respond:

*Come, Lord Jesus!*

**SECOND CANDLE (PURPLE)**
The first and second candles are lit as this prayer is read:

*Jesus our Hope,*
*we prepare a welcome for you in our homes.*
*May our homes be a place of true peace*
*and our families a beacon of love and respect.*
*Dear Jesus, we wait in hope for your love. Amen.*

These suggestions are then read:

*We can show love and respect in our homes by:*
Always treating our parents, brothers and sisters with respect
Turning off the television and playing games together
Making Christmas gifts for our family rather than buying them
Offering Christmas gifts of service rather than gifts we have bought
Offering to do household jobs instead of spending time on the computer

After silent time, a student says:
We wait in hope for the new dawn of God’s love!

And all reply:
Come, Lord Jesus!

THIRD CANDLE (ROSE PINK)

Three candles are lit as this is read:

Jesus our Joy,
we wait in joyful hope
for you to change our world.
The whole human family waits for an end to injustice and suffering.
We wait for an end to violence and conflict.
Dear Jesus, the world waits for you to break the chains that bind us. Amen.

These suggestions are read:
We can be signs of hope in our world by:
Buying Fair Trade chocolate and other Fair Trade products
Rejecting violence on TV, at the movies, on video games and on the internet
Rejecting brand name clothes
Making friends with people who are rejected or despised by others
Taking an interest in the plight of people who face injustice and violence in Australia and around the world

After some silent time, a student says:
We wait with joy for the coming of your justice and peace!

And all respond:
Come, Lord Jesus!

FOURTH CANDLE (PURPLE)

Four candles are lit and the following is read:

Jesus our Peace,
all creation waits for the peace you bring.
We prepare for your coming by caring for our planet
and all who live on it.
Dear Jesus, the whole world waits for you to make everything new. Amen.

These suggestions are read:
We can care for our planet by:
Using cars less and walking and riding bikes more often
Wasting less and recycling more
Using water wisely
Using less electricity
Growing some of our own food at home

After some silent time, a student says:
We wait for a world made new by God’s love.

And all reply:
Come, Lord Jesus.

FIFTH CANDLE (CHRISTMAS-WHITE)
The final candle is lit and the following prayer is read by all:

*We rejoice for God is with us.*
*We rejoice for the light of Christ has ended the darkness.*
*We rejoice for God’s justice flows like water.*
*We rejoice for Christ’s peace has come.*
*We rejoice for Christ sets us free and the world is made new.*
*In joy, we commit ourselves to respond to Christ’s call to love God, our neighbour and our Earth. Amen.*

Conclusion
There are many more suggestions for changes you could include in the ritual above and you may wish to discuss these with students in preparations for the ritual or afterwards. Your students may be already doing many things which challenge the dominant consumerist culture. This ritual may give them a chance to reflect more deeply on how it dehumanises them and help them to make healthy changes.

Caritas Australia’s Be More Challenge offers many more opportunities for students to make changes in their lives which free them from the grip of consumerism and may enable them to contribute to making a better world.