

**Twelve Wishes for You at Christmas**  
**Christmas Eve 2008**  
**Larry Reimer and Sandy Reimer**

Sandy - We began Advent speaking about what we most long for, what the child in us still yearns for, that moment when all the pieces come together at Christmas and we are surrounded by love and touched by mystery. We have to prepare, of course, for what we can; but most often it's the unexpected moment of grace breaking through our fears and our busyness that touch the deep longing and yearning we carry within us like a child who hopes for the perfect Christmas. It's the surprising renewing phone call, a note of gratitude from a friend, the moment of being able to really help someone else, the look of wonder in a child's eyes, the spontaneous touch of a loved one, the candles glowing in our circle outside on Christmas Eve – those are the moments of grace that move us to tears and fill our hearts.

Tonight is meant to be the culmination of that longing. And yet, if we look at Christmas another way, it is also true that the traditional celebration of the Twelve Days of Christmas really begins tomorrow. When you think about it, everything we've been doing for the past four weeks is preparation for these next twelve days, twelve days that take us from Christmas Day through New Year's Day to Epiphany, the day when tradition has it that the Magi arrived at the stable. These next twelve days are actually our opportunity to celebrate the beauty of Christmas without all the pressures that have bogged us down for the month of December. And just like that wonderful song about the Twelve Days of Christmas, Larry and I have twelve Christmas wishes for you, wishes to carry you through Christmas and into the New Year. We even have this list of twelve wishes printed for you to pick up as you turn in your candle tonight, so you can enjoy them during these next twelve days.

Larry – #1 - I wish for you this night that you will hear the promise of the Christmas story as it came to people long ago, people who were living in an occupied country, people who were struggling to survive. This year, we have been blindsided by this economic crisis that has knocked each of us off our financial base in one way or another, so we offer wishes that don't cost much money.

In this time of the shaking of our economic foundations, I wish that you may find your way through these tough times without too much hardship or pain. I wish for you to be able to hang on to your house and your job. I wish that that the money crunch won't inflict irreparable damage on your family or on our church.

In those times and places where the financial pain is severe, my wish is for you to know that you are not alone, that friends, family, and this church will stay close and dear, and that you may experience the joys of a child at Christmas, discovering once again how deeply you are loved and how much your love means to those dear ones in your life.

I wish that you may hear the good news of this night, news that transcends the bad news of the stock market and all of the world's disarray, news that the Spirit of God is indeed with us and incarnate within us. "Fear not," say all the Christmas angels. "Fear not, I bring you good news of great joy for all people."

Sandy - #2 – The second wish has two parts. Part A: if and when you are with family during these next twelve days, I wish that you may all relax enough to enjoy each other. I've been on several sides of the Christmas family visitation conundrum.

I grew up with a huge extended family all living in the same town. I moved not too far away and then very far away from my parents. I have had adult children who were very far away and are now close by, and now I have grandchildren. So I know that it's hard to be everywhere you want to be and with everyone you want to be with at the same time.

It is stressful on every side of the equation to come up with a holiday scenario that is reasonably fair and inclusive and still manages to be fun. So I wish safety and joy to everyone who travels and to everyone who welcomes the family travelers. I wish a sense of a joy and satisfaction to you, as you care for each other, accepting and celebrating the ways you find to connect this Christmas.

Part B of my wish is for everyone to give each other a little slack. I hope we all remember that Christmas is not a real good time of year to confront an extended family member with an issue you've wanted to bring up for the last three years. I hang an ornament on my Christmas tree each year that says "Welcome to the North Pole. No pouting; be kind; and watch out for thin ice." I think those are good parameters for all of so that we can give each other the break we need in order, as the Psalmist says, to find how blessed it is to dwell together in unity at Christmas.

Larry - #3 - On those times in the next 12 days when family leaves or you return to your own home, or you are simply alone, I wish for you to find ways to enjoy the gift of solitude in this magical season. I wish you the gift of a long walk in the beauty of Florida winter. I wish you the gift of a good book that you can actually finish. I wish you the gift of a visit to your creative self: a moment to write in your journal, or read last year's journal, to craft a poem, to play your guitar or piano, to paint a flower, or take a sunset picture. I wish you the gift of time to re-read and savor those Christmas letters and cards, time to light a candle, to enjoy the Christmas tree. I wish you the gift of a less-crowded Gainesville with museums and movies and places that you may not usually have time to see.

Sandy - #4 - If you are in Gainesville on Sunday, I wish for you to enjoy the gifts of worship here at UCG. The service is going to be beautiful and meaningful, a little quieter than our past Sundays have been, with space and time for you to reflect on where you have been and where you are going in the coming year. If you aren't able to be here, then I wish for you to find a way to set aside an hour of Sabbath this coming Sunday in whatever ways open you to the Holy. Either way, I wish that you may be able to set aside some sacred time.

Larry - #5) - I wish you the energy to get rid of one place of clutter in your world ... Oops this is clearly Sandy's wish for me as well as all of you. Sandy, you'd better take this one.

Sandy - Ah yes, one of my callings in life is clutter clearing, a physical cleaning out that not only frees up space but lets in fresh air with the things of our life. This clutter clearing mirrors the emotional and spiritual resorting we need to do in order to welcome and make room for what is new. The second part of my wish is that you truly limit yourself to one part of one day to deal with clutter, lest too many of your twelve days descend into the clutter of too much to do. And Larry, if I may make a suggestion, you might want to start with that shelf in your closet where you empty your pockets and wallet. Umm - better yet, just start with your closet.

Larry - #6 - I wish for you to be able to make a journey some time in the next twelve days (which is what I might do to get away from my closet). It can be a daytrip to anywhere within

an hour and a half drive of Gainesville, or if you're able and inclined, an overnight jaunt or camping trip. The twelve days of Christmas are all about the Magi's journey, and, as we're fond of saying, everyone in the Christmas story except the innkeeper traveled somewhere. Part of this wish that you take a journey is that you not wind up like the innkeeper who had no room for anything or anyone new.

Sandy - #7 - I wish you the gift of recognizing your angels, those people beyond your current family, who help to make the rough places smooth in your life. Call an old friend; write a note to someone who has made a difference in your life this year.

Larry - #8 - On New Year's Eve, I wish for you to remember the earth in your New Year's resolutions. I wish for you to choose one additional thing this year that you can personally do to help save our planet and to conserve our resources.

Sandy - #9 - On New Year's Day, I wish that you may ponder the new era we are entering, with a new president, an era of hope that the greed of the few will give way to the needs of the many, that we will discover that we have more in common than we have in conflict, and that we as a nation will find common ground by moving to higher ground.

I wish for you to find your part in this new era of promise. I was struck by how impassioned those readers at Lessons and Carols were as they read the passage from Isaiah of a new day dawning when creation would be at peace. Consider the star in your sky and where it is leading you this year, to find meaning, to be of service to this world. And say a prayer for the New Year, your own prayer, write it down and keep it.

Larry - #10 - This is a wish we love from the Dalai Lama. I wish for you to "Live a good, honorable life. Then when you get older and think back, you'll be able to enjoy your life a second time."

Sandy - #11 - Since this is season leading to Epiphany Sunday, which is all about revelations of new truth, I wish you during this next twelve days, one good, resounding, "Aha!", one of those times the cartoon light bulb flashes on over your head. I wish you a moment when you slap yourself on the forehead and say, "I got it. It's all so clear. What took me so long?"

Larry - #12 - As you receive all these wishes, we invite you to think of a wish as a spoken prayer. Sometimes wishes are the wings that a hope comes true on. Sometimes naming the hope sets us free to wish for it.

As you hold your candle, and gaze across the courtyard tonight at the light of all of our candles together, I wish that you will remember that moment of light all through the coming year. May you remember, as Ted Loder says\*, "that God is here not only in the lights of these candles, but also in every song you hear, whenever a baby cries or a child laughs, whenever beauty is done or truth is told or love whispers. There is one unshakable reason to sing tonight: the baby born so long ago grew to be an adult, and he insisted with his life that God has an eye on you and will never, never lose you in the dark."

*\*Ted Loder, "Dare to Sing," Tracks in the Straw: Tales Spun from the Manger, 1997.*