



# Catholic Courier

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## “Christmas is...”

### *Diocesan Catholics decry commercialism, emphasize reaching out during season*

By MIKE LATONA, STAFF WRITER

#### Charlie Brown, you're not alone.

In “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” the popular “Peanuts” cartoon character is hilariously frustrated at every turn as he attempts to identify the true meaning of Christmas. Much to Charlie Brown’s exasperation, his cohorts view the season as a time for receiving presents and winning decorating contests.

Not until Linus solemnly quotes the second chapter of Luke, which recounts the birth of Jesus, does Charlie Brown get the answer he’s been searching for. This prompts him to buy a sickly looking Christmas tree, saying that all it needs is a little love.

In real life, many people struggle to peel the many layers of distraction away while ranking their priorities at this time of year. Yet a cross-section of comments from diocesan Catholics indicates that this is not an impossible task.

Many of those interviewed for this story were disappointed with the rampant commercialism surrounding Christmas. Yet at the same time, they emphasized that by recalling the examples set forth by Jesus — particularly the spirit of compassion and giving — the season can be one of continued joyfulness.

Here’s how 13 people responded when asked, “What does the Christmas season mean to you and/or those with whom you are close to?”

**Bishop Matthew H. Clark**, diocesan bishop since 1979: “(Christmas is) that constant call to us that when we see *any* human beings, to see an ‘enfleshment’ of God’s love. I’m noting a tendency these days to depersonalize people ... a tendency to make judgments, especially about the poor.”

Bishop Clark, who will continue his annual practice this year of visiting the Monroe County Jail on Christmas Day, explained: “We can too easily write off people who do things we don’t like, or who even do bad things. It’s not to say we condone evil things, but we need to be careful that we’re not harsher on others than we would want them to be on us. I began visiting the county jail on Christmas because it was appropriate on the feast to be present for people who could easily be forgotten, or who could use a special measure of encouragement.”

“To me, the Christmas feast is not just a call to remember something that happened a long time ago. If it’s only that, it’s too easily to make it romanticized or get nostalgic. It’s a living feast — a current, living celebration of God’s deep love for us.”

**Michael Drexler**, pastoral associate and young-adult minister at Blessed Sacrament Church, Rochester:

“For myself and my wife Cindy, this is certainly going to be a special time as we joyfully expect twins. Being in the season of Advent, we’re both anxiously awaiting and preparing for this special gift of God.

“It helps keep the season in perspective. Quite often the Christmas season is busy and it’s easy to lose the spiritual focus. This year I think we’re able to focus a little more clearly on what the Christmas season is all about.”

**Lois Berke**, who, along with her husband Al, coordinates a staff of more than 30 people who serve as parish ministers through the Sick, Lonely and Elderly program at St. John the Evangelist Church in Greece:

“(Those who are ministered to) look forward to the visits, especially as the colder weather closes in. Many don’t have any other visitors; their children may live out of town.

“To be shut in and not able to get to church where ‘all the action’ is, they really appreciate any time they can get to see visitors.”

Among the younger parishioners at St. John the Evangelist, Lois observed, “I think the children are participating more and more (at Christmas). I’m grateful to see that.”



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