

## "Christmas is..."

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**T. J. Grab**, senior at Aquinas Institute:  
"In the words of Charles Dickens, I believe Christmas is the best of times and the worst of times. Christmas is a celebration of life, and it brings out the best of who we are as people. At Christmas time the values of sharing, sacrifice and love shine forth. We become the people who we've always wanted to be. I wish every day was Christmas — not because of the gifts that we receive, but because it is a day on which people experience the true meaning of God's love of life.

"However, the Christmas season also creates undue stress and anxiety in people's lives. Our society places too much emphasis on the material aspects of Christmas. People go out and spend money they don't have, pile up large bills, and place themselves in unfavorable economic positions. I believe gift-giving has its merits, but in our society the importance placed on gift-giving has distorted the true meaning of Christmas. Christmas should be kept as a religious and spiritual celebration of the goodness of the human spirit, and of what we truly are as human beings."

**Erika Frick**, eighth-grader at Blessed Trinity School, Auburn:

"Christmas means many things to me. It is much more than just candy and presents. For me, Christmas is very special because it is the one time in the year when my whole family can gather together to celebrate. We celebrate something very special, the coming of Jesus Christ.

"Even though the gifts, food, decorations and cards are a part of Christmas, my family never forgets the true reason why we are celebrating."



**Monsignor Gerard C. Krieg**, pastor at St. Stephen's Church, Geneva: "It's the opportunity to live the Christian mystery once more — when there's the possibility of remembering a little infant's eyes and seeing them in the eyes of other infants. Everyone around us has the opportunity to begin again; to be refreshed.

"We are the image of God and we must acknowledge that. It's more important that we work off that model than the 'rational animal.' We are serving the Christ-child, and it is that image that is being refreshed at the Christmas season."

**Katherine Delo Stritto**, sixth-grader at Auburn's Blessed Trinity School:

"To me, Christmas is a lot of things more important than presents and candy. It is a time to be with my family, and to see all the relatives I haven't seen in a long time.

"The most important thing, I think, is that it is the season of our Lord, and we all should be happy. Today people in the world tend to forget the true meaning of the season. They spend most of their time worrying about what gifts they're going to get for people, or what people are going to give them. Also, everyone always seems very rushed. Over the years Christmas has become one big shopping spree. The stores are packed with people looking for just one more present.

"Although everyone would rather receive than give, if I keep Jesus Christ in my heart I know that I believe in the true meaning of Christmas. It is the joy the season brings to all people and the feeling you get when you give. This is far better than the feeling of receiving."

**Sister Mary Walter Hickey**, SSJ, principal of Notre Dame High School, Elmira:

"Christmas is a time of love, happiness and thoughtful gen-



erosity. It is a time for family and friends to come together and celebrate the birth of Christ.

"At Christmas each of us needs to extend ourselves and watch out for those who, due to some circumstances, are sad and depressed. It is a season which calls us to open our hearts and bring peace to all whom we contact."

**Father Vincent P. Panepinto**, chaplain at Elmira Correctional Facility and Reception Center:

"Christmas is a very different experience for these men. They're separated from the rest of us and it's very difficult for them; it can be a dark day rather than a day of light. There can be a certain sense of hopelessness.

"But the season does not have to be one of hopelessness. (The prisoners) still have the ability to dream dreams, to see the vision of the possibility of change. There's also the possibility of becoming a part of a real Christian community in a prison. That kind of aspect is important.

"This is the Advent theme for all of us. There are opportunities for everyone."

**Lucy Dechaine**, director of community services for diocesan Catholic Char-



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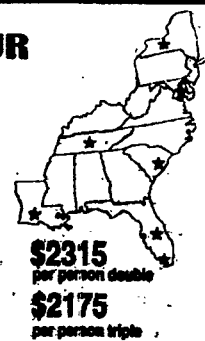
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ities:

"I've always enjoyed the Christmas season. It's a cheerful time when people seem to be more upbeat than the rest of the year.

"Of the people we serve with developmental disabilities, many do not have family with whom to share the season. Many are adults who live alone and might not otherwise have anything.

"It's very important to make sure they enjoy the season, and this is done through the agency Christmas party. We are also providing them with gifts this year through St. Charles (Borromeo) Church (in Greece).

"We also try to help people contact their families when possible and spend the holiday with family members or friends."

"I see Christmas as a time for giving and a time for making sure that other people have what they need, primarily spiritually and emotionally."

**Sister Nancy O'Brien, RSM**, director of the Livingston County Rural Outreach, based in Mt. Morris:

"To me, Christmas is a celebration of Jesus' birth and all that the life of Jesus meant. He was very much present to the poor throughout his life — to the person rejected by society, maybe, for whatever reason. Jesus was there to try to make life better for those people, and that's what I'm trying to do now (with the rural outreach).

"With the Christmas aspect, it's not only nice for people being helped, but also for the people buying a gift or 'adopting' a family. It makes Christmas more special because they've given of themselves."

**Paul Ferrari**, parishioner in the Cayuga Team Ministry Cluster:

"In our family it means that everybody gets together and it's simply a holiday.

"Christmas itself is a different question. I think of the incarnation and all that it represents; dealing with Christmas in the modern world, it's almost at odds with what's been done to it. And I do think that Christian churches and ministers have allowed themselves to be used by commercial interests.

"But what I'm grateful for, what the church does by celebrating Christmas, is that it asks us every year, 'Are you prepared? Are you prepared?' Nobody else does that. Everybody else distracts you from asking fundamental questions."

**Julia Wixom**, parishioner in the Naples/Prattsburg Catholic Community:

"I think of all the blessings that the Lord has given me. I enjoy the season very much, (but) it's more commercial than it ever used to be.

"When I was growing up we were poor, but we always had a Christmas tree and a nice dinner."