

Joy to, and care for, the world!

10 green Christmas gifts

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Ah, the Christmas list. We want to give thoughtfully, generously and from the heart to the people who fill ours. But the task can be daunting, the money insufficient and the ideas sparse.

For gift-giving inspiration, why not look to the spirit of St. Francis and "*Laudato Si'*" ("May You Be Praised"), the encyclical penned by the pontiff who adopted the name of the nature-loving friar?

Published earlier this year, the work challenges the faithful and non-believers alike to consider the destruction we have inflicted on the environment and our fellow humans, especially the most vulnerable, and to meditate upon the beauty of creation.

"St. Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of His infinite beauty and goodness," writes Pope Francis.

One way to "care for our common home" (the subtitle of the pope's document) is to give "green" gifts — items or experiences that have a small ecological footprint.

"A person who could afford to spend and consume more but regularly uses less ... shows the kind of convictions and attitudes which help to protect the environment," Pope Francis writes in "*Laudato Si'*." He also says that reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, "when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity."

With the pope's words in mind, here are some gift ideas for loved ones young and old.

Costume box

Fill an old suitcase or decorated box with cast-off clothes from your closet — adding funky hats, wigs or other accessories from a thrift store — to create dress-up outfits.

Donation

Pick a cause your loved one cares about — the environment, social justice, life issues — and make a donation in his or her name.

Memories

For grandchildren or older children, wrap a special item — a doll you've kept from your childhood or an heirloom jewelry box — with its story in a handwritten message. The note gives them a piece of your history to cherish.

Date night

Give frazzled moms and dads a night off by babysitting and/or buying them a restaurant gift card.

Time-tested recipes

That banana bread recipe you've tweaked to perfection (and are willing to divulge), the pie crust recipe that's been in your family for generations — compile them in a recipe file-card box or homemade recipe book. Shutterfly and other Internet-based services can help create a professional-looking book.

Membership

While many D.C. attractions have free admission, membership to a nature center, zoo or kids museum often offers perks like free parking, exhibit previews, tours and special events.

Explorer kit

Peruse Craigslist or eBay for a microscope and slides, binoculars, maps and magnifying glasses for a kids explorer or young scientist kit. Look around thrift stores and your house for other creative additions, such as a compass or old leather-bound journal.

Coupon book

Compile a booklet filled with acts of service for your husband or wife. Some ideas: "I'll make dinner tonight"; "I'll fold the laundry"; "Sleep in this morning, I've got the kids and breakfast covered."

Local veggies

Community supported agriculture brings members seasonal vegetables or dairy items from local farmers. To find a CSA for the foodie on your list, go to bit.ly/CSA_christmas.

Fair trade gifts

Catholic Relief Services Fair Trade, through a partnership with the nonprofit Serrv, offers a variety of gifts at bit.ly/Serrv. Your purchase helps farmers and artisans improve their lives through sustainable trading systems. CRS also partners with Ten Thousand Villages fair trade stores. Find a store near you at bit.ly/VillagesStores.

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