



## *Reflection from Fr. Garry Richmeier*

According to the Church calendar, we have just begun the Advent season. According to our cultural calendar, we are well into the Christmas season. Our culture portrays Christmas as the most wonderful time of the year, but for many people, it's one of the most depressing times of the year. Reasons for this can include:

- it is the time of year with the least amount of sunlight, which can lead to SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder)
- feelings of inadequacy that my family does not measure up to the media images of perfect, happy families reuniting to celebrate and enjoy each other's company
- feelings of sadness and grief because of the loss of a loved one in the past year and not being with them at Christmas time
- stress due to all the extra activities and demands placed on our time which typically occur during the season
- financial pressures related to buying Christmas presents for everyone

There are some things people can do if the Christmas season gets too overwhelming or depressive. One possibility is to simplify where possible. Maybe give simpler, less expensive gifts. Donating our time or resources to those in need can often raise our Spirits and counteract feelings of inadequacy. Many loved ones may appreciate our spending time with them rather than an expensive gift. Maybe we can focus on just a couple important family traditions rather than trying to do them all. A few well-placed, quality decorations can often be as beautiful as thousands of lights strung on every part of the house. If we are feeling the loss of a loved one, it may help to share those feelings with someone rather than keeping them bottled up. We can re-evaluate our "to do" list -- cross off some of the less important items, and add some quiet time or alone time, just for ourselves.

Everything doesn't magically change during the Christmas season, regardless of the cultural messages we get. Reminding ourselves of that, and continuing to do the self-care things that work, is the best way to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression this Christmas season..

*Blessings,  
Fr. Garry*