



FRUGAL GIFTS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

By Susan Vogt
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In response to my quest for simple, creative, and inexpensive Christmas gifts, I received over 16 pages of wonderful suggestions. Most fell into the categories of:

- **Coupons** for personal services (chores, babysitting, time together, sharing a talent, repairing something, making dinner, etc.)
- **Memories** (collecting, scanning photos, memorabilia, genealogies, etc.)
- **Food** (baking, recipe collections, frozen meals, etc.)
- **Words** (a love letter, a list of compliments, poems, etc.)
- **Charities** (family service projects, scholarships, see specific causes on my website)

Although these are especially helpful during hard economic times, shouldn't this be the way we celebrate Christ's birth at any time? While these were originally collected as Christmas gift ideas for family members, most can be adapted for any time you want to be generous.

TOP DOZEN INEXPENSIVE, CREATIVE, OR UNIQUE GIFTS

1. **A personalized "care package."** Notice the kinds of things your spouse or friend likes (brand of coffee, soft drink, chex mix, carrots, sweets) and pack them in a basket.
2. **A framed commitment** not to nag about _____ (e.g. minor annoyances, pet peeves) or a promise to get in shape, exercise more, eat better in order to be a healthier spouse or child.
3. **Try the attic and basement for gifts** – heirlooms or things with sentimental value that could be passed on
4. Plans for an **outing** (the zoo, a hike, a picnic) or an **"inning"** (renting a favorite childhood movie, game night, anything nostalgic that you can do in your own home)
5. **A mix of favorite music** on a CD
6. **What does your spouse or child complain about?** Promise to do a disliked chore or clear something from his/her "to do" list.
7. **Treasure hunts.** Clever clues and the hunt are as much fun as the gift at the end.
8. **Free lessons.** Teach one of your skills or hobbies (singing, piano, cooking, computer tutoring...)
9. **Free cards!** When we were newlyweds we would go to a greeting card store together and read the cards to each other that we thought were funny or fit our spouse - cards that we would have bought for each other but we didn't want to spend the little money we had on cards. (*John & Amy Giorgio*)
10. **Celebrate the 12 Days of Christmas** (or the octave of a birthday) by doing a special little treat for your spouse or child each day (a favor, a chore, a note, a compliment, a favorite chocolate, a back rub...)
11. **For young children:** Create a "dress up box" with glitzy cast off clothes, ballerina or princess costumes, crowns, and tiaras... Goodwill is a good source.
12. **For the young at heart:** Create a "craft tool kit" with crayons, markers, glitter, glue, staples, stickers...

A SUMMARY OF THE BEST OF THE REST

COUPONS FOR SERVICES:

Give the gift of your time to an elderly relative or lonely friend. Create a coupon to be redeemed when they need help around their house or doing errands. A variation we did last year was to create a certificate which was an invitation to our home for dinner once a month. Nothing grand, just a change to the routine and some good company. *Dale & Kathy Kasnic*

One of my children gave me a gift of cleaning my house which included dusting, mopping, and vacuuming by just letting them know the day and time this gift could be "accomplished". *Louise*

Some of my favorite gifts from John were when he repaired things for me. One year I asked him to fix my exercise bike, so I wouldn't have to buy a new one. I hate buying new stuff if we can fix old stuff. Another year I caught up on mending some of his flannel pajamas. *Debbie Barrett*

After the birth of our last son, my brother and sister-in-law came over and brought all the ingredients for dinner. Cooked it for us, ate with us, then cleaned the kitchen back up. A complete night off and we still got the benefit of some great company. *Julie Elmore*

Rent a DVD or VCR tape, pop some popcorn, reserve a night to be company for a parent, grandparent. *Lita Sharone*

Certificates to spend a day or weekend with each grandchild individually doing something that is unique or special to each child. *(Many sources)*

MEMORIES

Since our son, Kevin died, our family has several done several things in memory of him. The first Christmas, we had a "Kevin tree." Everyone brought an ornament and told their own memory of Kevin. One year we wrote our favorite humorous story of Kevin to be collected into a "Kevin book." This year we will bring photos and share them and a memory. We do this to have Kevin with us when we are all together and to continue to share who Kevin was with his son, our grandson, Justin so he will know his Dad through all of us. *Beverly Hartberg*

My children are in their early thirties. This year I am wrapping up their rock collections, stamp collections, cabbage patch dolls [and clothing], sports trophies and scout paraphernalia. We will go down memory lane together on Christmas day when they receive these special gifts from the "treasure trove", aka, our basement! *Mary Jo Pedersen*

As a mom, my favorite gifts have been framed photos of my children, even a snapshot. Collages, videos, or a recent photo of the whole family are favorites. *(Many respondents.)*

FOOD

Probably the best, cheapest, and most yummy Christmas gift I have given is soup and bread. I make a big pot of soup. Then I buy a good loaf of bread. I put the soup in a ball jar and in a paper bag I deliver the soup and the bread to someone I like and I think would appreciate the soup... so no meat to vegetarians... etc. *JT Spence*

Our two children are grown and both spouses work long days. For Christmas this year, my husband and I are preparing batches of frozen soups, casseroles, and breads, that they can take home and defrost for a quick meal. *Mary Salm*

WORDS

Use two clear jars. Fill one with about 50 colorful folded up squares of paper. On each paper handwrite a memory, things I like about you, or an inside joke. The purpose is for the receiver to pull out one memory a day and transfer it to the second jar, everyday someone can read another "pick me up" to help get thru these rough economic times. *Stephanie Molina and Nancy Kohley*

Compose a handwritten letter to your spouse, parent, or child expressing your love and commitment. *(Rose Jacobs and others).*

Several years ago a few members of my family were struggling financially and informed us that they could not participate in the Christmas exchange that year. We couldn't just have some of us opening presents at Christmas and some of us NOT opening presents, so we exchange names and prayed for that person. We presented our "Secret Prayer Person" with a Christmas card with list of the "deeds done in their name" and special prayers, extra prayer services and Masses that we attended and offered up for them. *Noreen Wendeln*

One word gift - Select a word for the person or people in your life. Gift them with that one word that honors who they are. You can tell them in person or in an additional written piece why this is the word you are presenting to them For example, I have gifted words such as 'authentic', 'genuine', 'honorable', 'loyal'...etc, *Krista Athey*

A good group of friends and I gather to celebrate Christmas yearly. We take 1 gift. The only rule, we can not purchase it. We bring something that has blessed us that we already own. Something we feel God is calling us to pass on. We discuss how the item we are giving away has blessed us, and why we are giving it up. They can be such simple things, yet given with so much sacrifice and love. *Carolina Ward*

I got some very inexpensive boxes which I decorated myself and enclosed a letter for each of my children and husband. In the letter I put all my feelings, love, gratitude, joy and a chocolate kiss. *Alicia Colindres*

CHARITIES

Donate an animal, a tree, or a year's education in a loved one's name:

- Heifer Project . www.heifer.org
- DeCamp www.marianist.com/decamp
- Kiva www.kiva.org/app.php?page=home
- Plow and Hearth (www.plowhearth.com)
- Give a child a full year of education and hope for the future:
\$15 pre-school, \$35 elementary school, \$200 high school, \$1000 college
Send the gift recipient's name and address along with your check to:
Sisters of St. Mary Africa-Brazil
241 Lafayette Ave., Buffalo, NY 14213-1453
100% of your donation goes to the poor in Rwanda and Congo,
Sr. Patricia Brown, SSMN

Donate your time, talent or money to a local social service agency, the library, a nursing home, etc. Write cards to the homebound. Deliver them yourself, perhaps with a plate of cookies! Do this in honor of one of your loved ones.

My brother Ed used to give each of his siblings (all 6 of us) a card with \$50.00 cash- the card message would be, "Give this to someone who needs it. *Ann Hirt*

We learned of several households in need. We contacted friends and family and with the help of many completely furnished a home for three, paid the rent and bought two months worth of groceries and gas for a young single mother and gave her gift certificates to make her own purchases for her child for Christmas, partially furnished another home, and are working on a couple more. *Sharon Kohrs*

We sponsor a family in my niece's Catholic school. She sends the list to us and we either purchase what is needed or send her a donation to cover the cost of the items. *Anne Keough*

Our family of 10 adults and 12 grandchildren, are trying a new approach to gift giving this year. We're all bringing things we have at home that we are willing to give to a homeless person. The adults are bringing used, but usable household items (like towels, bed linens, kitchen supplies and cleaning supplies). The children are bringing toys, stuffed animals, kid videos, etc. We have the names and needs of 9 residents from a local agency. We will wrap the gifts as part of our Christmas day celebration instead of opening gifts. On the day after Christmas we will all gather to deliver everything. *Jane & Jack Katenkamp*

MISCELLANEOUS

Since my children were very young, I have organized a treasure hunt for each of them for late on Christmas Day when presents have all been opened and there is a respite from all of the early morning hustle and bustle. I prepare a series of clues for each person to find items hidden

throughout the house. These items have been small gifts/notes/quarters, (variety pack cereals, etc. Sometimes, a single gift came at the end after they had found all of the clues. *Michael Van Gundy*

My first Christmas with Ann I had no money. We did get a fresh cut Christmas tree. I made an additional cut on the bottom of the tree and turned it into an tree ornament. I inscribed on this tree ornament "our first Christmas tree" and wrapped it for Ann's gift. She loved it! This special ornament making has become a tradition. We now have tree ornaments with the following inscriptions:

- Our first married Christmas
- Our first Christmas with ?? (Jenna was not born yet)
- Jenna's first Christmas

Tim & Ann Mauro-Vetter

A gift certificate for a place your spouse likes to pick up something special like a coffee, a juice, a burger. Maybe attach a little poem:

For you on your way
please stop where you may,
I am glad to pay
to help make your day...
...hope it's ok!

Jean Lorang

Our daughters, 12, 10, and 8, receive 3 gifts Christmas morning-- 1 from Santa, 1 from Jesus, and 1 from Mama & Daddy. We remind them that Jesus only received three gifts. The gift they receive from Jesus is something religious (rosary, cross bracelet or necklace, saint book). The gift they receive from Mama & Daddy are small, because they know that at Christmas, we give money to charities to help them help others. The gift they receive from Santa is usually something a little more expensive but not over \$100.00. *Amy Dzuik*