

Pastors Conspire Against Commercializing Christmas

✖ While many Christian leaders campaign to keep Christ in Christmas by going after retailers who use the words “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas,” a group of pastors are waging a different kind of culture war.

Now in its fourth year as a rising movement, Advent Conspiracy challenges church members across the nation to fight against the commercialization of Christmas by replacing consumption with compassion.

In 2005, Rick McKinley, pastor of Imago Dei Community in Portland, Ore., and his pastor friends were privately bemoaning the upcoming Christmas season when they came up with a radical idea to change the way their congregants celebrate Christmas.

The group came up with a four-pronged approach to returning Christmas to its original purpose that involved worshipping fully, spending less, giving more and loving all-especially the “least of these.” The church leaders urged members to bypass the typical overspending on gifts and maxing out credit cards, and instead focus on donating money to support humanitarian work and other worthwhile projects.

Since Advent Conspiracy's inception, more than 5,000 churches have been involved in donating millions of dollars to various causes, such as the movement's choice cause of digging wells in developing countries through a ministry called Living Water International.

"[Advent Conspiracy is] generating income in the multiple millions of dollars," says Living Water President Jerry Wiles. "It's a very effective way of getting people involved and creating awareness there is a global water crisis and that people can do something about it."

McKinley admits initially some believers were unsure about what to do in exchanging the gift of presence for presents. "Some people were terrified," he says. "They said, 'My gosh, you're ruining Christmas. What do we tell our kids?'"

But after reassuring their members they were not advocating total abstinence from gift giving, the pastors said congregants began to participate in various projects.

"Christians get all bent out of shape over the fact that someone didn't say 'Merry Christmas' when I walked into the store," McKinley says. "But why are we expecting the store to tell our story? That's just ridiculous." [, 12/15/09; , 12/20/09]