

Bringing Jesus to your Neighbors: a *Las Posadas* family activity

In Mexico and other Latin American cultures, the nine days leading up to Christmas are celebrated by a nightly re-enactment of Mary and Joseph's search for an inn or "posada." Families process from house to house. At the final house they are welcomed in – with the way lit by candle luminaries – for a *party!* For more details of how *Las Posadas* are celebrated, take a look at [this family's way of living them](#).

If you're comfortable hosting such a gathering, organize a real *Posada* on your block. If not, use this *Las Posadas* inspired activity, outlined below. Either way, the tradition provides a beautiful "excuse" to reach out to your neighbors with the hope and love of the Christ Child, a novena of outreach.

Adapt this idea however your family wants to do it, and have fun with it! Maybe you do one big event. Maybe you knock at one neighbor a night for nine nights. Maybe you host a neighbor a night for cocoa and carols. It's up to you.

You will need:

- An image of Mary and Joseph from your crèche (or simple costumes for two of your kids to dress up) to carry with you, and maybe some candles.
- Copies of the card included here for each of your neighbors, explaining the *Las Posadas* tradition and inviting them to participate in this adapted activity: constructing two luminaries and putting them at the end of their driveway/sidewalk or outside their door on Christmas Eve.
- Materials for two candle [luminaries](#) per neighbor you plan to visit
 - Brown or white paper lunch bags (paper should not be so thick it blocks the light)
 - Sand, about 2 cups per luminary (or pebbles or kitty-litter – think big bag of playground sand at a home/yard supply retailer)
 - Votive candles (depending on safety concerns in your area, use traditional or battery-operated)
- Mexican hot cocoa or some other appropriate treat per neighbor
- A simple Christmas gift bag for each neighbor

Variation: Instead of luminaries, give materials to create an outdoor-friendly ornament that your neighbors can create and hang on an illuminated tree in your front yard at any time leading up to Christmas. On the ornament they could write something they're grateful for . . . or something they want to pray for.

What to do:

- Learn about this tradition as a family. Talk about how it is important to share the light and love of Jesus with others. This activity is one way to do that.
- As a family, prepare the gift bags for your neighbors with the card (signed by everybody in the family – maybe you even include your house number), materials, and treat — perhaps while sipping cocoa?
- Say a simple prayer together before going out on your adventure. . . and smile! Carry the figures of Mary and Joseph and candles. Maybe you even want to sing a carol as you walk.
- When you knock at neighbors' doors, be friendly and natural. Consider the following talking points:
 - Introduce yourselves – you're out wanting to get to know your neighbors and share one of your family's Christmas celebrations with them.
 - You have something for them, and want to invite them to participate in a simple tradition— the explanation and all the needed materials are in the gift bag.
 - Ask them if there is something they'd like you to pray for in your family night prayers and let them know you're there if there's anything they need. (*Remember their requests in your Advent prayers.*)
- Have your own family *Posada* party. Piñata anyone?
- On Christmas Eve, light your own luminaries and take a look at your street. Salvation is dawning. You have shared Jesus, the Light, being born into our dark world — whether your neighbors light their luminaries or not!
- Discuss as a family what this experience was like. *How did you feel? What were people's reactions? How might you build these new relationships with your neighbors in the new year? How can you share Jesus' love with them by acts of kindness and service?*

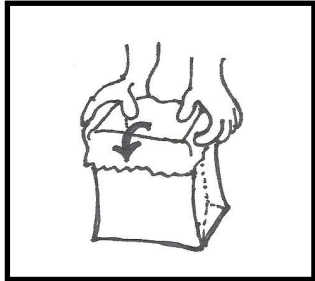
Loving God, you sent Jesus, the Light of the World, to be close to us and to show us how to live with love and joy. Be with us now as we seek to bring that love and joy to our neighbors. May they open their homes and hearts to you. Jesus, please use our hearts, hands, and voices to bring your light into the world. Amen.

Find this and other resources to share at dmdiocese.org/living-advent



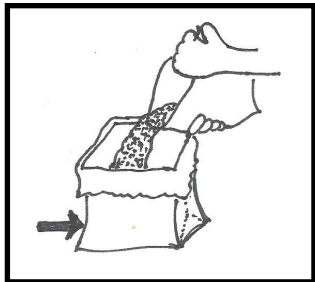
How to Assemble your Candle Luminaries

1



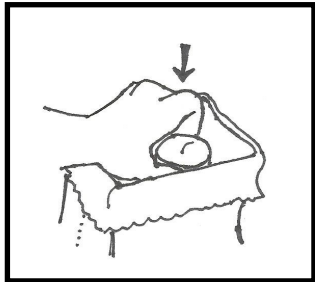
Open the bag & fold down the top edge 2" to keep it open. If you want to, punch decorative holes before opening.

2



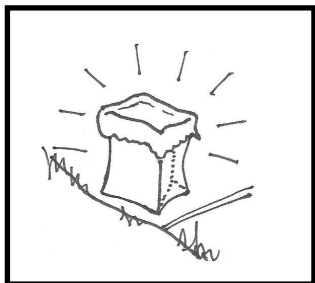
Pour in the sand (or pebbles or kitty-litter) to give weight and stability.

3



Nestle the candle into the sand.

4



Place the luminary & light the candle taking the necessary safety precautions.

Do you have
room?



A Christmas Tradition for your Family

The *Las Posadas* Tradition

A popular tradition in many Hispanic cultures is to re-enact the journey of Mary and Joseph looking for a place to stay in Bethlehem. For the nine nights leading up to Christmas, families sing and process from door to door. Participants from within sing their part about having no room, and the procession continues to another door. Finally, the Holy Family's way is lit by candle luminaries and they are welcomed in (with all those in procession) to enter the home for a big party which may include:

- Prayers/singing around a nativity scene
- Lots of food
- Traditional drinks like "hot punch" and hot cocoa
- A piñata, hit with a stick to spill sweets for everyone

Out in the Dark

This is a story with which we can all identify in some way, whether we hold Christian beliefs or not. A couple, alone, tired and stressed. . . out in the dark. . . seeking welcome, warmth, and light. Where do you see isolation, anxiety, and darkness in our world today? Where do you experience it in your own life?

Christmas is a time for seeking the light of hope and opening up to the joy of being loved and sharing that love with others. For Christians, that Light and Love has a name: Jesus.

It is our prayer this Christmas that your heart and your home would be filled with light and with the joy of knowing love — God's unconditional love for you, and the love of family and friends.

Our Family's Invitation to You!

As a symbol of our neighborhood welcoming light, peace, joy, and love in the midst of the various forms of "darkness" troubling our world, we invite you to join in a small part of this *Las Posadas* tradition.

1. **Assemble luminaries** with the materials we've provided (see the back of this card for instructions).
2. **On Christmas Eve** at _____ p.m. **place** your luminaries at the end of your driveway/sidewalk or outside your front door and **light** them.
3. **Take a look outside** and see your neighbor's lights. We are not alone. Together we can bring light, hope, and love to our families, communities, and world.
4. Think of a way to **share love** with those nearest you.

From our family to yours,

Merry Christmas!