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Christmas Letter For a Shelter for Homeless Children ...

Dear Friend,

Before Jesus leaves here on Christmas Day, I wish I could get a chance to talk to Him.

I mean, we're both pretty busy around here on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning. Maybe later in the day when things have calmed down some. Maybe then we could talk.

I think I know what I'd say.

I'd tell Him what an honor it is to be here at Christmas time, even though it's always a bit scary for me. When those kids start showing up on the afternoon of the 24th -- hundreds of kids we've never seen before -- I always worry that we won't have enough beds or cots or sleeping bags for them all.

I'd tell Him that every year I struggle to hold back the tears when I see Him in the faces of those new kids, who can't stand to be alone on Christmas Eve.

Their faces say, "Please love me. Just tonight."

I would love to talk to Jesus about Christmas Eve Dinner. About how brave the kids are. How they sit down with total strangers and pretend to be family. How sad that is.

I would also ask Him how to make those kids feel like they really are part of a family. That they aren't just pretending.

I hope He already knows how hard we try to do that.

I'd ask Him if there's any way that next year, He can warn me about the kids who need extra help.

Maybe He can give me a sign to let me know that the girl in the Bugs Bunny sweatshirt is going to start crying in the middle of dinner and won't stop until bedtime.

Maybe He could point out the boy with the scar on his cheek who will start an argument over nothing and storm out into the cold night because he can't stand the closeness ... only to return two hours later, frozen and desperate not to be alone.

I also wish He could mark those kids who come here hoping for too much.

I mean, we really try to make Christmas Eve a happy, family time here, but there's only so much we can do.

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Maybe we could set up a signal for next year. You know, some way that He could say, "Okay, Sister. Good work. Now step back and watch Me make Christmas happen."

I know that there is a point at which He takes over. You can almost feel it.

The kid's faces brighten. The crying girl stops crying. The angry boy comes back in out of the cold.

The kids start to sing. They sing Jingle Bells. They sing Away in a Manger. They sing Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree.

Finally, just around Midnight, they sing Silent Night.

At our Midnight Mass, the kids are quiet, respectful, hopeful. They are under the Holy influence of a tiny Baby born 2,000 years ago.

I wish I could ask Jesus how He does that.

I also want to ask Him about the Christmas Miracle. I've been here for eight Christmases, and I've seen it every year.

Some time in the early morning hours, when the kids are still asleep, Jesus pours love into them. You can see it in their faces in the morning.

The crying girl is smiling. The angry boy is laughing. Kids who were so lonely and isolated they could barely speak are handing out hugs to any and all.

The kids are transformed. If you were here, you'd see what I mean and why I call it a miracle.

I have never seen anything else like it.

And Jesus is all over the room. He must be the world's busiest person on Christmas morning at this homeless shelter.

That's why I'll have to wait to talk to Him until later. After the wrapping paper is cleaned up and the breakfast is eaten, and the kids have settled down some.

Maybe then I can stop Him for a few minutes.

If I could really do that, I'd want to ask Him why He doesn't stay longer.

I mean, I know He is always with us ... always. But not the way He is with us on Christmas. Why does He have to leave?

Why can't the kids always feel as good as they do on Christmas morning? That's what I really want to know.

The hardest thing about Christmas at this Teenage Homeless shelter is that it ends.

I wish it didn't have to.

If I asked Jesus why Christmas has to end, I think He would tell me that it doesn't. I'm pretty sure He would tell me that it isn't that He leaves so much as that we move away from Him.

I think He would tell me that the love we all feel on Christmas morning comes from heaven and is always inside us.

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I think He would say that we could have a Christmas Miracle every day if we only loved each other more.

Maybe it's easier if I don't have that conversation with Jesus. I'm not sure I'm ready for that message.

I'm not sure any of us are.

Maybe that's why Jesus comes back every year at Christmas to remind us of what love really is.

We try. We all try. But it's hard to love like that all the time. It's really hard.

I am very, very grateful for how hard you try to keep Christmas love alive for my kids all year round. I could not keep this place open 365 days a year without your help.

In His Name,

Signer

President

P.S. It would be wonderful if you could join us for our Midnight Mass. Please call ahead of time (1-800-000-0000) so we can expect you and give directions. Merry Christmas!

P.P.S. The Christmas Miracle comes to Teenage Homeless Shelter only once a year, but the miracle of our commitment to the kids is a 365 day a year event. It is the love and generosity of people like you who make that happen. If you could send a special Christmas Gift to keep that miracle going, I'd really appreciate it. God bless you!