Holidays can be a chore

Shortly after our oldest was born, a certain parenting magazine just started showing up in our mailbox. After about three months, I noticed that every issue plays into stereotypes that mothers know all and are stressed out by their efforts at perfection, and that dads are lazy and clueless. I wrote many letters to the editor complaining that the magazine does its very best to pit parents against one another.

It can be tempting to think about the “business of Christmas” in these divisive terms. Here are four things to think about when the stuff that needs to get done during Advent threatens to overwhelm you.

Speak Up

When you’re doing a slow burn because you’re struggling to get the tree in the stand or trying to find all of the pieces to the Nativity scene, be honest about whether or not you asked for help – not passive-aggressively griped because this task has fallen to you alone, but legitimately asked for help. “They should just know” doesn’t count, either; mind reading is for county fairs, not Christmas. Ask. Nicely. And watch a little Christmas miracle unfold.

Less Is More

There’s a lot of pressure at the holidays for things to be “perfect” (whatever that means). But there is much to be said for trading trumped-up tradition and others’ expectations for a little more peace on Earth (or at least at your address). Decide what’s really important and stick to it. Let the rest go. Skinny down the card list or skip the pictures on Santa’s lap and go for some quiet reflection at church with your family. And let’s not forget that the feast of the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8) is a holy day of obligation.

Save the “Assumptions” for August

(That’s another holy day pun.) A recent article in Time magazine showed that parents of all kinds – working, non-working, single, married – are shouldering about the same amount of work between the office and the home. So when it feels like you’re doing more than your fair share and that your spouse is shirking their part of the holiday duties, think again. Don’t assume that you’re alone in your concern about getting it all done before the last candle on the Advent wreath is lit. Divide and conquer.

A Season of Giving

When it comes right down to it, Christmas is about giving, not getting. Advent isn’t about keeping score or winning. Consider “The Gift of the Magi”; Jim and Della don’t exchange hairbrushes and watch chains in an attempt at one-upsmanship. They selflessly put themselves second and the other first. Now apply that same idea throughout the season of Advent. Sometimes the most appreciated, most unexpected gift we can give is the gift of time. Taking a deep breath and doing so our loved ones have the luxury of not doing is a great kindness. When you’re overwhelmed with the amount of doing that needs to be done, don’t stew … do.