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NEWS RELEASE

**'UNPLUG' AND ENJOY CHRISTMAS, SAYS UD EXPERT
WHO HELPS PEOPLE SIMPLIFY THE SEASON**

Letting your children help you make Christmas cookies isn't merely a way to reduce some of the holiday baking burden, it's a great way to establish or continue a tradition that can help provide the whole family comfort and warm memories for years to come, says one University of Dayton source who's been helping people regain the true spirit of Christmas for 10 years.

Sr. Mary Louise Foley, F.M.I., from UD's office of campus ministry, annually offers "Unplug the Christmas Machine," a workshop designed to help people make personal transitions from materialistic, stress-filled and exhausting celebrations of Christmas to more simple and spiritual celebrations.

Particularly this year, when the events of and following Sept. 11 have placed extra stress on emotions, people seem to be searching for ways to move from commercialized holiday celebrations to those that are more personal and more spiritually meaningful, said Foley, who is also a native Daytonian and UD grad. She emphasizes tradition and simplicity as the keys to a successful transition.

"Traditions bring us together because they are familiar, they bond us," Foley said. "And the simple traditions are the ones that everybody remembers. If you ask children what they look forward to, they'll tell you it's the cookies they help make each year or helping to trim the tree. They pick up on the simple things that we don't think are a big deal.

"It's also good to resurrect traditions that have become lost," Foley said. "Often in a marriage one or the other partner loses some of the family traditions that meant the most to them when they were growing up." Reviving the most important of those not only benefits the partner who remembers the tradition, but can introduce a new aspect of the celebration to his or her mate, she said.

"Traditions also remind us of loved ones who've gone on," Foley added. "Doing the things we used to do with them not only brings good memories of the loved one, it can even provide an almost palpable presence of that person."

When you can't be with the ones you love, the simple gift of communication far exceeds an expensive present, Foley says. Enjoy a relaxed long-distance call or start a 'round-robin' letter, where each person in the family who receives the letter adds a few lines and then forwards it to another.

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To help simplify the season, share responsibility, Foley says. That tip is one of several she offers in her workshop. "Write down everything you do to get ready for Christmas, from shopping to wrapping and shipping, baking and decorating, school and work events, sending Christmas cards and so on. Then turn that list into a sign up sheet. Whatever doesn't get signed up for doesn't get done. The sign-up sheet not only spreads out the work, it will help reveal what aspects of Christmas are truly most important to your family."

Some other tips Foley offers in her workshop:

- Slow down and get some rest. Take time to stay healthy because people manage anxiety better when they feel good.
- Be realistic about your expectations for Christmas. If it has been a difficult year, do not expect it to turn rosy just because it is Christmas Day.
- Pad your Christmas-Day schedule to make sure that there is enough time to do everything you want to do. If not, celebrating some aspects of Christmas would be just as special a day later.

For media interviews, contact **Sr. Mary Louise Foley, F.M.I.**, at (937) 229-2093 or via e-mail at mary.foley@notes.udayton.edu.