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# DEAR FRIENDS

A Letter from the CLA President



## Everything Old is New Again

When I was a kid, at this time of year the “editor” of the school newspaper would always write the “True Meaning of Christmas” editorial. Since as I am writing this, social media is all aflutter with the Starbucks Christmas cup “brew-haha” (I didn’t make the pun up), perhaps I wax a little more nostalgic than usual for those simple days. And so I turn to that subject myself for this December edition of *Catholic Library World*.

We would almost all agree, I think, that Christmas has completely run amok. I saw my first Christmas commercial on October 6; however, complaining about the early appearance of Christmas is rather like what Mark Twain said about the weather—everyone talks about it, but no one does anything.

So what is a Catholic librarian supposed to do if we can’t fight the shopping mall? Those of us who work in Catholic schools, particularly universities and seminaries, ourselves decorate for Christmas or have a Christmas party very early in December because we are closed for a significant part of Advent and the Christmas season. Those of us who work in public libraries or public schools can’t prioritize Christmas over the winter celebrations of those of other faiths or those with no faith tradition.

One of the reasons I look forward to the Christmas break most (or winter break depending on where you work), is that the world seems to slow down. As Catholics, we have a theological reason for slowing down of course—to stand in awe at the Incarnation of the Lord. But all humans, if they are not engaging in some unrestrained Saturnalian revelry, feel the desire at least to slow down at this time of year.

That is how I think Catholic librarians regardless of the type of institution they work in can contribute to the season. We can advocate for taking some time out of this ironically busy part of the year to slow down. There are lots of Slow movements around these days—Slow Food, Slow Money, Slow Cities, even Slow Church. I’ve always wanted to advocate for Slow Libraries.

Slow and libraries seem antithetical to each other these days. Libraries have to be relevant; they have to be more, do more. They have to change as fast as the technology around them changes. To say that libraries should slow down makes one sound anti-technology, old-fashioned, lazy. But the Slow movements are neither for nor against technology. Mostly they focus on small communities, local goods, and sustainability. Recent studies have shown people enjoy libraries precisely because they are a quiet place to read and be in community with others at the same time. But as much as I personally love slowing down to savor a book in a quiet corner, bringing Christmas into the world means even more than that.

So during these holy seasons of the year (Advent as well as Christmas), let us Catholic librarians do our part to quietly anticipate and then stand in awe at the coming of the Prince of Peace. We don’t have to tell a single person what we’re doing. But we can act upon our understanding of “what Christmas means to me” by standing in awe of the Christ in every patron we serve and patiently and quietly listening to their hearts as well as their words. ■

Mary Kelleher, President