



Dear UUMC's 2016 Advent Devotional Writers,

As you get started on your reflection essay, the Adult Education Team at UUMC wants to thank you for the work and thoughtfulness that you will put into your piece. We don't underestimate how difficult it can be to write a good reflection, so please know that we are committed to praying for you and to encouraging you in this process. Some tips we would like to share:

1. Aim for concrete writing. Make your reflection as concrete as possible. Avoid abstractions, as tempting as they might be. For example, "I hate waiting at stop lights" is concrete. "The Christian life is about waiting" is abstract. You may find examples of concrete writing in the The Upper Room devotional booklets, which are available in the Church Office and Sanctuary lobbies. It's an excellent model for a devotional. The Upper Room is also found online at <http://devotional.upperroom.org/>.

2. Include robust, particular imagery rather than general descriptions. This is particular: "Sitting in my office at school, I am completely cut off from any sense of whether it is day or night outside. I have two lights that I can manipulate: a fluorescent light and an incandescent lamp. If I turn them off, it's creepy dark. On certain days it's unnerving, other days it's depressing, and I wonder if it is disrupting certain biological rhythms that God intended to keep me healthy."

This is a general statement of the same reality: "Light and dark are themes in Scripture and they're really important." True, but, nyeah, uninspiring -- and, worst of all, completely forgettable. The more particular you allow your reflection to be, the more universal it will become for the rest of us. Use vivid stories. Play with strong metaphors. Keep it earthy. Let it all arise out of the text and out of your response to the text.

3. Allow your essay to be a personal, affective wrestling with the theme. Move away from a cognitive exercise exclusively. Instead of standing outside of text, stand inside of it, feeling its tensions. Probe, sense and follow it down into its mystery. Don't spend too much time re-telling the scriptural text in your essay. We've likely read it already or will read it in light of the lectionary readings for the day. Engage the story as a kind of dialogue between yourself, the Scripture and God.

4. Give yourself permission not to have to resolve any tension or question by the end of your reflection. It's okay for us as readers to be prodded to think and feel deeper. It's good for our personal and spiritual health to wrestle more deeply with the implications of Advent in our own lives. We'll be better for it -- and we'll also probably remember it long after we've read your piece.

Word count limit is 300-350. The deadline is August 31, 2016. Send your reflection to Diana Dworin, UUMC's Adult Education Coordinator, at ddworin@uumc.org.

We'll send a few friendly reminder emails along the way. If you're not able to get us the reflection by August 31, we'll have to move on without it. We're working with tight deadlines and we need time to edit, lay out the design and have it ready on the first Sunday of Advent.

If we think your piece might need a little gentle editing, we'll let you know straightaway.

Blessings,

UUMC's Adult Education Team