



**Mennonite  
Church  
Canada**

Resource Centre

# From our Churches

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## Absent Advent Lament

By Jeff Warkentin

*Jeff and Tany Warkentin, with their two children, Danika and Asher, have lived in Burkina Faso since February 2006 as Mennonite Church Canada Witness Volunteers.*

Canadian Christmas, Advent arrives  
And we think of what Jesus has done for our lives  
Advent activities help us prepare  
The weather and other signs make us aware

It's advent – sure, some things are just for excitement  
Santa and presents mark money and time spent  
Leamington Christmas Parade, Kingsville lights  
Warm up our souls, light up our nights  
It's advent – it's kind of hard not to tell  
Turn on the lights, music, let the love swell

I still remember the lack of daylight  
cold, shortened days, suppers at night

Eternity on the pond, hockey 'till dusk  
Shoveling, skating, eat if you must  
Then back to the ice for fellowship, fun  
Take off your skates, feet weigh a ton

First Advent in church helps us to prepare  
And if that's not enough there's the chill in the air  
Temperature drops, there are smells, sights and songs  
Stimulating senses all Advent long.

Choir practice denotes the season  
An attempt at rendering voices less brazen  
Lo! He comes with clouds descending  
Go and tell it on the mountain

On Christmas Eve, children sing, the church is full  
A group of small angels is waiting to pull  
Out the candy that's found in those brown paper sacks  
Eat it all quick, give your orange to your dad!

Off to Oma's, sing the carols  
Wrestle Uncle Gerry, play with Cousin Daryl  
Cinnamon, chocolate, pine trees and presents  
"Wasn't this year sure better than previous Advents?"

Driving home, more carols on the radio playing  
While the windshield gets wet – is it snow, is it rain?  
It is Leamington...Advent – Church, food, family, song  
Times when it seemed like there's just nothing wrong  
With the world – joy to her, the Lord has come  
H Handel's *Hallelujah* helps the message hit home...  
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*Riding my bicycle while the dust flies  
Thinking of Christmas, well, going to try  
The dust falls like gentle snow as I go home  
I peer through for signs of Advent – I see none...*

*'Unless you can count the odd business front window  
Where someone painted Santa on 4 years ago  
And now he's all faded, and for good reason  
The heat, sun and dust seem to stifle the season  
But wait...*

*At the breaking of the heat  
Somewhere in the street  
A boy makes a crèche from heaps  
Of old cement blocks, but keeps  
The little people figurines out of the crèche  
until the day of Christmas*

*Christmas in Burkina Faso, a one-day event  
No carols, no candles  
Advent Absent*

*Girls and women may have made a new dress  
A big pot of t<sup>ô</sup>, extra meat, nothing less  
For on Christmas Day there's no shortage of bread  
Family or not, you're a neighbour – be fed!*

*Simple gifts, like food, are abundantly given  
Children sing in the street for gifts they might earn  
A Muslim will visit the Christian for he  
Did the same for the Muslim last Tabaski<sup>2</sup>  
The two sit and talk, and then, Bon Appetit!*

*In churches the young ones prepare for their pageant  
On Christmas Eve, late, they get to present  
The story of Jesus and shepherds that keep  
Watch – the littlest kids play the role of the sheep*

*And all stay up late singing songs until Eve  
Becomes Day when all voices are given reprieve  
Then firecrackers sound until all go to sleep  
Mother's tie on their backs their worn out little sheep*

*The morning finds most people beautifully dressed  
In new outfits; and the food that cost nothing less  
Than December's wages – it's for all to share  
Those with not much to give pray for better next year*

*Are these parts of the world at all comparable?  
Are not these two: Ouaga<sup>3</sup> and Leamington full  
Of people looking for signs that God's present?  
Still somehow I feel I am missing Advent*

<sup>1</sup> A thick mixture of corn flour, water and oil – the staple food of Burkina Faso

<sup>2</sup> An important Muslim holiday

<sup>3</sup> The diminutive of the capital city of Burkina Faso: Ouagadougou (pronounced Wahgadougoo or Wahga)