Bishop Vinton R. Anderson

President of the World Council of Churches, Presiding Bishop 2nd Episcopal District, AME Church

CHRISTMAS is the primary gift-giving season when merchants have meticulously arranged their merchandise to assist customers in choosing the perfect gift for the right person. Each year choosing becomes more difficult, because over the years scientific and technological achievements have given new shape to the marketplace. The creative and inventive mind has tried to leave no stone unturned in producing what might be considered the perfect gift.

Now we talk about virtual reality, but the truth is, our reality is marked by human imperfection. For in the end, we cannot know what is ultimately best for another. We humans have not used our gifts to secure the perfect environment for the whole inhabited earth, so we continue in a state of conflict, while self-indulgence almost always defines the human situation. We need a sign of hope!

For those who claim Christmas for its true meaning, the coming of the Christ child brings that hope. The apostle Paul writes, "God was, in Christ, offering peace and forgiveness to the people of this world." II Corinthians 5:19 (CEV)

*Coming to the end of the millennium, the beginning of the 21st century signals to us that our work of making peace with God and one another is unfinished. Yet we do not despair, for Christmas will come again and again to remind us that God's incarnation in Jesus Christ—*God's perfect gift*—makes possible the impossible.*

The Rev. Dr. Suzan D. Johnson Cook

Senior Pastor, Bronx Christian Fellowship Baptist Church, Bronx, N.Y., and the only minister named to the President's Racial Advisory Board

CHRISTMAS is one of my favorite times of year. First, as a Christian I rejoice in the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I start becoming excited when the Advent Season approaches, because those four weeks allow me to prepare spiritually for the "Coming of the Lord" in my own life and for new spiritual birth.

As a pastor, I see the joy and love of God exhibited in such a wonderful way. From the wonderful Christmas hymns and children's songs to the pageantry, there is an excitement that cannot be compared with any other time of year. And we end the year and the Christmas week with Watchnight Service, which is my very favorite service, as we collectively thank God for the past year we had, and for the New Year which is before us.

As a New Yorker, Christmas allows me to see New Yorkers at their "nicest" moments. Somehow the guards are dropped and the "edge" softens a bit. People speak to and smile at one another and truly embrace the Christmas spirit. New York is also very beautifully decorated and the streets and sidewalks are absolutely breathtakingly bril-