

What To Do With Old Christmas Cards

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As Christmas 1843, approached, Henry Cole was too busy doing his duties as director of a museum that he had no time to write letters to his friends. So Cole asked his artist friend, John Hossely, to create a printed greeting card for him. While Hossely thought he was just doing a favor for a friend, his card caught the attention of others. Soon the Christmas card industry was born.

I enjoy receiving Christmas cards. But what always puzzled me was what to do with cards once you receive them. When our children were little we sometimes stretched strings across the wall and arranged the cards on them. The trick was to stretch enough string to hold all the cards without having so much extra string that it looked like you were expecting more cards than you received. In the end, it really didn't matter because enough strings broke or fell down that most of the cards ended in a pile on a table.

After Christmas, the problem of what to do with the cards multiplied. They were just too pretty to throw away. Besides, if you save them long enough they might become collector's items and make you rich – just like my baseball cards would have made me rich if I had had the foresight to see them as monetary instruments instead of little cards for playing make-believe baseball games.

But as winter turned into spring cleaning time, the stack of Christmas cards eventually had to go. Every once in a while we would hear of a missionary or an orphanage that wanted used cards. It was a joy to send them, partly to help out and partly to ease our consciences about throwing away such pretty cards.

Sometimes people cut the pretty pictures off the cards and save them for crafts. Even if they never got around to making the crafts, they likely find it easier to throw away pieces of cards than the nice whole ones.

Some people keep parts of old cards with the idea of using them to make their own cards for the next year. But when the next year comes around they run the risk of sending a card back to the person who had originally sent it.

Our dilemma of what to do with Christmas cards was finally solved about ten years ago. Like usual, we put them in a basket until after the Holiday Season. Then my wife suggested what has become a family tradition. At each mealtime we take one card from the stack. Someone reads the printed verse in the card along with any personal greetings. As we bow our heads to thank God for our food, we also ask His blessings upon the friend or relative who sent the card.

Even though the card then heads for the great white bag in the wastebasket under the sink, it no longer seems so sad to throw it away. For one by one the cards bring us closer to each other as God hears and honors our prayers.

And there's an added bonus: by throwing away just one card each day we eventually avoid agonizing over what to do with the whole stack.