

A Question of Etiquette: Living in a Christmas village

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Well, this will sound very humbug, but I am at my wit's end with my next-door neighbors. Their lawn looks like an explosion of inflatable Christmas characters by night, and a holiday display of dead-looking characters, deflated

and sad, by day. I'm not sure which is worse, although the by-day presentation is sort of depressing, and messy, really. But that's not the worst. The worst is that they blast Christmas music out of speakers from sundown until almost midnight. I mean blast. We can hear it through our storm windows, curtains shut. I truly don't want to be the humbug neighbor, but could I at least ask them to turn the music down?

You could, or you could strive for your cheeriest self and think that it is only a few days until Christmas is over and do your best to not listen. Then fill yourself with hope that Christmas is when the display, and the music, end. If they keep it going and you are looking at Groundhog Day as right around the corner on your calendar, by all means knock on the door and suggest that it is time to turn off the music. You probably won't ask them to drag the sad and deflated characters off their lawn, but you can hope that they will.

I have been invited to celebrate Christmas at dinner with a family that really is like family to me. The hostess has said I shouldn't bring a thing, everything is taken care of. We don't exchange gifts, but I want to take a gift of some sort, because I so appreciate their including me. Would this be all right?

Yes, it would be fine to take a gift, as you usually would when invited anywhere for dinner. You could take a game for the whole family to play, a pretty Christmas cactus or poinsettia, wine, something you have baked for them to enjoy the next day, or for their breakfast the next morning, a holiday music CD, (if they have a CD player), or your favorite holiday movie on a DVD (if they have a DVD player), for example. Since you are close to the family, you would know best what they might enjoy.

How do I address a holiday card to a married couple when the woman has not taken her husband's last name?

Our thirteen-year-old twins recently celebrated their Bat Mitzvah. They each received a separate but identical gift from some people. May they send one thank-you note signed by both of them, or individual notes?

They should send individual notes, but make sure that they each write to each gift-giver so there is never a situation that creates a "polite twin" and an "impolite twin" response if one writes a note and the other doesn't.

I think you have answered this before, but can't find the column where you did. Our wedding rehearsal is coming up and I want to be sure that the ushers know what to do when escorting guests to their seats. Do they offer their right or their left arm?

Ushers offer their right arm to female guests. If a female guest has a husband or escort, he walks behind the usher and his wife or date. If two or more women are together, the usher, where possible to determine, offers his arm to the oldest woman in the group, and the others follow behind. A male usher does not offer his arm to a male guest, but rather walks beside him to escort him to his seat. If there are female ushers, they do not offer an arm to guests, unless someone needs help, but instead walk beside the guests to show them their seats.

Questions for Catherine? Send them to catherine.michaels@gmail.com.