

Written for the Door County Advocate-December 20, 2008

It's OK to say "Merry Christmas". That's what I think. That's what I say. Maybe you, too. And it seems we're in the majority on this one. Here's what I read recently: A full 77 percent of Americans say they say "Merry Christmas," according to a FOX News poll released Tuesday. Democrats (28 percent), urbanites (28 percent) and Northeasterners (25 percent) are among those more likely to say they feel pressured to use a generic "Happy Holidays" greeting. On the flip side, Republicans (87 percent), regular churchgoers (82 percent) and rural Americans (83 percent) are more likely to say "Merry Christmas," the poll found.

Our church gave away a couple hundred buttons with the picture of a simple stable and a bright little star and the words "It's OK to say 'Merry Christmas'". I wore a button on my coat collar all during December and I kept an extra couple buttons in my pocket. I can't tell you how many buttons I gave away to people who saw mine and said, "Hey, great button. Where can I get one?"

I like the button because it reminds me that, for me, it is okay to wish someone a Merry Christmas. I'm not trying to insult anyone, and I'm expressing my hope that they do, indeed, enjoy a happy holiday called Christmas. (I would not be offended if a Jewish person wished me "Happy Hanukkah." I'd be honored that they would want for me a happy holiday that is significant to them.)

I also hope someone who sees the button realizes I'm sending them a message: It's OK to say "Merry Christmas" to me. They don't have to wonder if I'll be offended, and they don't have to be concerned about what to say. "Merry Christmas" works; it's okay.

My button also conveys a perspective I have about saying "Merry Christmas" instead of some churchy expression like "Have a blessed Christmas". That just sounds weird to me. Of course, I want people to be blessed by God and to recognize Him as the source of blessing and to be grateful for the blessings He brings to all people, and especially to people who follow Jesus Christ. But come on, fellow Christ-followers: Quit sounding so churchy, and be real.

It's OK to say "Merry Christmas" because if anyone has a reason to be merry, it's someone who knows Jesus Christ, who recognizes the need for a Savior (and that Jesus came to save people from the penalty for their sins), and who understands that it's wise to play follow the leader when Jesus is the Leader. Remember the message from the angel on the night Jesus was born; we read it in the Bible, in Luke 2. It was a message of "good news of a great joy that will be for all the people" and the appropriate response is the angelic response: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Good news. Great joy. Peace for those with whom God is pleased. And God is pleased with all those who count Jesus as the greatest gift and who make him their greatest treasure. If anyone has a reason to say "Merry Christmas", it's the person who believes the angelic message and takes it to heart. It's OK to say Merry Christmas. Really.

Cory Dahl is pastor of First Baptist Church of Sturgeon Bay. His e-mail is cdahl@sturgeon-bay.com
Bible verses are from [The Holy Bible, English Standard Version](#) (ESV).