

What should I do with all of my unwanted stuff?

Unless your house has been featured on A&E's "Hoarders," there comes a time when you feel the tendency – no, the need – to clean out. This feeling also reminds me of my mom, who used to have boots resoled and would patch my father's work jeans until there was nothing left to patch. "We live in a throw-away society, Cory," was her refrain, which she tried to counter with her actions.

It wasn't a lesson I was eager to learn when I was a kid. "New" was always better than "old." But as my house fills with stuff I think about the virtues of reuse and restoration.

Part of our Catholic Christian obligation toward stewardship is to ensure that there is enough for everyone, and that we leave things better than we found them. In that spirit, here are 10 ways to turn your trash into treasure. After all, if Jesus can turn water into wine, we can recycle those CDs in the attic.

1. Lots of communities have a "spring cleanup day" on which the city picks up junk. The night before the garbage trucks roll, people are out in force picking up things they can reuse. Consider hanging on to something you'd trash until it has a shot at finding a useful home.
2. Contact local charities to find out exactly what items are in need. Many organizations collect clothing. The organization Goodwill moves a lot of toys and cookware. You'd be surprised at value that still exists in things that have outlived their usefulness for you.
3. Set up a work, neighborhood or kids' book exchange to swap out those beloved volumes that are gathering dust.
4. Before you throw something away, consider offering it for free to a new home on a sharing website. Be sure to

provide an accurate description and a photograph!

5. Use old CDs as coasters, or paint and decorate them to make them sparkly Christmas ornaments.
6. Home remodels are common in the spring. Before taking a "scorched earth" approach to your demolition, research local companies that will dismantle bathrooms/kitchens/floors/decks in a gentle fashion and resell the pieces to others who have a use for them. In my hometown, Minneapolis, The ReUse Center (www.thereusecenter.com) takes donations of reusable building materials. And they're tax deductible!
7. Ladies, gather your girlfriends together and do a make-up and jewelry exchange for all those personal decorations you never use because they're "just not your color."
8. Consider composting; reuse kitchen and yard waste and turn it into the stuff you buy at home and garden centers every spring.
9. Make the leaky garden hose leakier ... poke holes in it to make it a soaker hose for gardens and new lawns.
10. Ask your optometrist to turn your old eyeglass frames into sunglasses. Or donate them to a charity (like a local Lions Club) that will recycle them for an individual who can't afford new glasses.