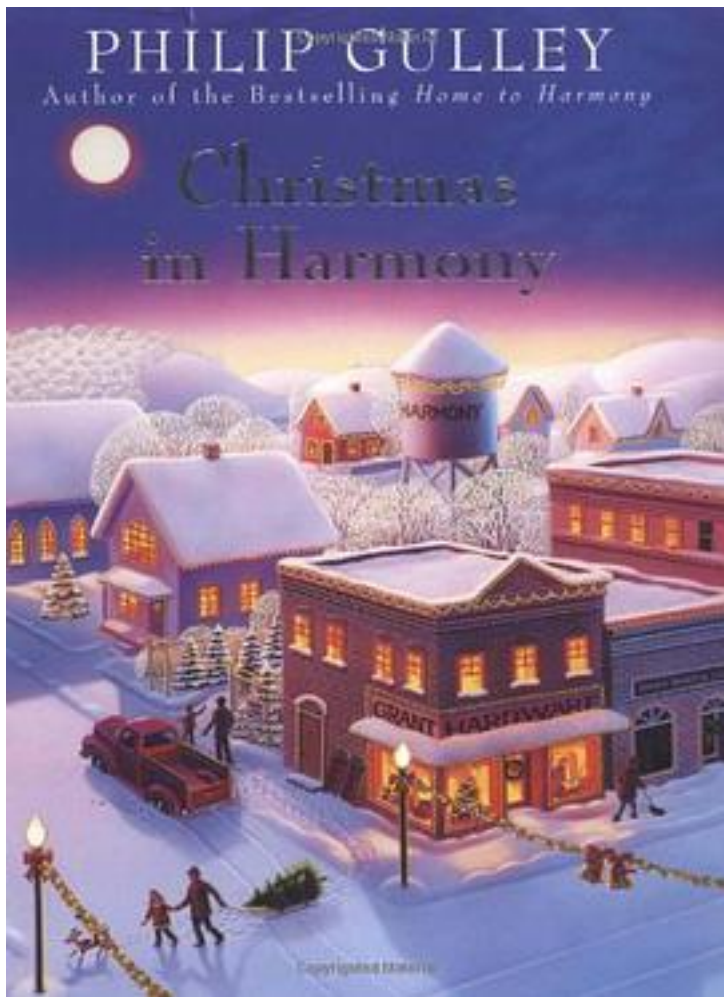


Christmas in Harmony



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Philip Gulley takes us to Harmony, Indiana, at Christmastime as inspiration strikes the inimitable Dale Hinshaw. Always looking for a way to increase the church's profit

margins, Hinshaw brainstorms a progressive nativity scene that will involve the whole town, complete with a map like those for the Hollywood stars. Neither Pastor Sam Gardner nor the other members of the Harmony Friends meeting express any enthusiasm for this idea, but Dale is unstoppable. Meanwhile, Pastor Sam has his own concerns: he's having his annual argument with his wife, and he's worried that the four-slotted toaster he bought for her may be too lavish a gift. Amidst the bustle of the season, the citizens of Harmony experience the simple joys and sometime loneliness that often go unseen. Sam comes to the realization that Dale, in his own misguided way, is only trying to draw meaning from the eternal story of Christmas. "In this unsettled world, it is good to have this steadiness -- the Christmas Eve service, the peal of the bell. . . . There is a holiness to memory, a sense of God's presence in these mangers of the mind. Which might explain why it is that the occasions that change the least are often the very occasions that change us the most."

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