

FOREWORD

Halloween is a very secularized event. Yet, its themes of role-playing, fear, and hell, provide natural bridges for sharing the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

In Him we can be who He made us to be, overcome fear, avoid hell, and be real! With a little brainstorming, observation of your community, and a willingness to draw outside traditional lines, the church can use Halloween as an evangelistic time.

This manual is designed to give specific ideas you can use to share the gospel at Halloween. But, more than that, it should also stimulate you to think of your own ideas. Almost any secular event or holiday can be adapted to reach outside the body of Christ and be evangelistic. Ask yourself: "What are the events in my community or church at Halloween that can be used to reach the lost? What are the interests in my community that I can plug into and use as a vehicle for sharing the gospel? What needs in my community can be met by using a Halloween activity where Christ's love is shared?"

In addition to ideas for evangelistic events, this manual offers preaching themes for Halloween weekend or the weeks around October 31. With the world focused on superficial fun, this season provides the opportunity to show people they can enjoy themselves in the name of Christ.

It is the hope of the Evangelization Group of the North American Mission Board that Halloween-and every holiday season-can be a tool for reaching the unsaved.

INTRODUCTION

Plastic-faced Spiderman and Batwoman
Crisp, fall nights
Jack-o'-lanterns
Soaped windows and egged cars
Scary stories
Bobbing for apples

Recognize Halloween? If you are middle-aged or older, Halloween may bring back pleasant memories, though it has always been a night for pranksters and scary stories, too. Most children do not know anything about Satan or witches. They only know to dress up and get free candy-good deal! It is the only time it is cool to take candy from strangers!

For most people, however, the face of Halloween is changing. As spiritual warfare heightens and gains more attention, as the world becomes more evil and people understandably less trusting, Christians are increasingly challenged with what to do about Halloween.

One extreme says to ignore it because it is a pagan holiday with evil roots. But your children know other children are having fun, don't they?

Another extreme says to let your children dress up as witches, skeletons, and devils, and go trick-or-treating, as long as it is in safe neighborhoods. After all, YOU are not worshiping Satan or doing anything mean. It is harmless fun.

There is another choice. Realize that one thing is certain: Halloween will not go away. Why not take advantage of it? This training guide is designed to help you and your church redemptively use a secular event to share the gospel. And you know what? Your children-and you-can have fun doing it!

The unsaved and confused people of this world are not likely to storm your church in large numbers asking for answers to life's questions. We must take the message of Jesus Christ to them in creative ways that package it attractively, yet reveal Jesus Christ when the package is opened. Halloween affords us the opportunity to do just that. So do many other seasons of the year.

This manual offers strategies to enable you to better share Jesus at Halloween. It is formatted according to the simple "A-B-C" method for strategically planning evangelistic events.

"A" stands for "attraction." Unsaved people must be attracted to your event. No matter how dynamic your program, no matter how glorious your music, and no matter how engaging your speaker, evangelism cannot take place without an audience of unchurched people. Plan an event which will attract the unchurched. Be sure to capture the interest of the community when you promote it. Remember that promotion must be accompanied by enlistment. Members of your church should bring their friends, neighbors, relatives, and coworkers to the event.

"B" stands for "bridge." Provide a nonthreatening, relational bridge for sharing Jesus. This could be a meal, special music, group-building fellowship activity, evangelistic film, or any number of other elements to bring people together to hear the message of Christ. Create a climate in which communication of the gospel can take place.

"C" stands for "communicate the gospel." Evangelism cannot happen unless the gospel is communicated. There is no point to your event without this. The gospel must be clearly and convincingly expressed to your audience. Plan to share Christ with as much care and detail as you use planning the other elements of your event. Follow-up is crucial. You must record and follow up on all who surrender their lives to the Lord.

Be daring. Be willing. Take the gospel to your community.

HALLOWEEN—PAST TO PRESENT

So, what is bottom line on Halloween? Is it about Satan and witches? The answer is not so easy. Certainly, for most people, Halloween is not about Satan and witches most people, certainly most children would not know a witch if they bumped into one, and most people have never considered worshipping Satan.

Yet, a historical look at Halloween is of value. In order to intelligently deal with this subject and Christians will deal with Halloween one way or another we must understand its roots. Halloween began as a pagan celebration, but not satanic in nature. While evil elements are certainly still in Halloween, it has evolved into a much more commercial festival.

Halloween was originally a holiday of the Celts and Druids in Northern Europe and the British Isles. The Celts celebrated their New Year on October 31. The Druids, an order of Celtic priests, were witches. They performed animal sacrifices, practiced fertility rites, and performed rituals to placate dead relatives. From such things came the practices of dressing up in costumes and trick-or-treating.

Halloween further came to be associated with witches and ghosts because it was long believed to be the time of year when departed souls revisited their homes. The Druids believed that this was when the immortal soul passed from person to person, or person to animal.

The Catholic Church eventually tried to "Christianize" it. In the ninth century, Pope Gregory IV established October 31 as "All Saints Day," creating an alternative to the pagan custom.

Today, much is made of the fact that Satanists celebrate Halloween, but in fact, this is not their primary holiday. Halloween, though, is the most important of four major dates for many involved in witchcraft.

Obviously, Christians have no business dabbling in witchcraft or associating with Satanists. But is that what Halloween in this era is mostly about? And does some negative element prevent Christians from taking advantage of an event to share the gospel. The bottom line: is there any justification for Halloween in your schedule?

Answer this question with a question. Is there justification for evangelism in your schedule? If the answer is "yes," then there is justification for Halloween.

You can have an activity around the time of Halloween without actually celebrating Halloween (many churches have "fall festivals," for example). Also, you can have a named Halloween celebration without giving the impression of supporting witchcraft or worshiping Satan. In fact, you can make a point to give the opposite impression, and in so doing share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ with many. Pray with a sincere heart, and follow the Lord's leadership as you plan. All that is needed is a willing heart to reach people for Christ. This manual suggests resources and helps you understand how to use them.

BASIC STEPS

Following is a framework for organizing an evangelistic event. Although every church is unique, principles and procedures suggested are basic to every church's needs. This framework, or some variation, should be applied to all events.

1. Set the date.

Schedule the outreach dates as far in advance as possible. You may or may not have the outreach event actually on Halloween. Be sensitive to other Halloween-related events in your community. Also avoid, if possible, scheduling major church events the month preceding the outreach meeting to allow for thorough preparation. This will be particularly important in light of the fact that October begins a new church year for many churches. Many of your key leaders may already be adjusting to new responsibilities. You will want to make the date accessible to as many people as possible.

2. Establish the program content and personalities.

You will want to enlist workers for the event far in advance, especially any who may play a more prominent, public role, or who are undertaking decorating or design tasks that are time consuming.

3. Organize the people.

This is the key area of outreach preparation. Organize the congregation into Ministry Teams. Depending on the size and complexity of your anticipated outreach, organize Ministry Teams who will lead the church in spiritual preparation, prayer, visitation, publicity, hospitality, and inspiration. Carefully select the chairperson for each Ministry Team. All Ministry Team chairpersons should be ready to begin their work at least six weeks before the outreach date. Possible Ministry Team chairpersons can be those people who serve on the church Evangelism council. The church's size will determine the number of Ministry Teams needed, as well as the number of people needed on each Team. Do not assume your church only needs one or two Ministry Teams simply because you are not a "large" church. The key to effective preparation is to involve as many church members as possible in some capacity of participatory preparation. Those involved will be the

people most eager to invite unchurched friends. Generally, for every person you actively involve in the outreach preparation, you will have four or five additional people present in the outreach services. So, involve everyone. Some suggested Ministry Teams, along with specific plans for their work, are described later in this planbook.

4. Train the people to do the work.

We are often guilty of giving people jobs without training them to do the work. Do not make this serious mistake. Once the chairpersons have agreed to serve, set up an appointment with each one individually. The pastor, another church staff member, or a qualified, committed layperson may do this. By taking time to meet in this manner, you demonstrate to each leader how special this outreach effort is, and how important is their involvement.

Give each chairperson a copy of their Ministry Team's worksheet and calendar. Share with them your excitement and emphasize the important part they have in leading the church into real outreach. Let them know they are part of the Core Ministry Team, which will be the primary coordinating team for the entire outreach meeting. See that all questions are answered as fully as possible and that the chairpersons know what they are to do.

5. Train the people to share the gospel.

If you're not going to do this, don't bother having an event.

6. Set goals.

To identify a goal is to define for yourself and for others what you believe to be God's will. Goals give a sense of where you want to go and, consequently, some understanding of where you do not want to go. Goals provide a way of telling others what you think is a desirable outcome so they can work under the Holy Spirit's power. Do not be afraid of identifying specific goals for the church outreach. Make the goals concrete and measurable. Aim at nothing and you are likely to hit it. Aim at a clear target and you are more likely to come close. Once the Ministry Teams are appointed, the pastor and/or the general chairperson should lead the Evangelism council and/or Core Ministry Team to prayerfully set goals and put them in written form. Suggested goals to set are:

- Attendance during the outreach
- Number of unsaved or unchurched people minister to during the event
- Number of people involved in prayer for the outreach
- Number of professions of faith

The pastor or general chairperson should not attempt to impose preplanned goals on the outreach. Goals handed to people are not likely to be taken as seriously as goals they set themselves. Emotional "ownership" of the event is crucial for the people. Therefore, the pastor or general chairperson should involve the Ministry Teams in setting the suggested goals and any other goals they may wish to establish. They will learn that goals soon become an expression of our faith. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for" (Heb. 11:1, NIV).

7. Initiate plans.

With the date set, leaders selected and trained, and goals established, it is time to put plans into action. Goals and plans are only dreams until they are put on the calendar and in motion. The general chairperson should check with each chairperson to see how work is progressing. Above all, see that each chairperson has put his or her priorities and plans on his or her countdown calendar (supplied with each chairperson's worksheet). The calendar will serve as a reminder of work deadlines. Each chairperson should start from the dates of the outreach meeting, then move backward and place each event on his or her calendar. The calendar will remind Ministry Team members of meetings and keep them from forgetting little jobs such as telephone calls to workers or the personal enlistment of helpers. Each Ministry Team, doing its job efficiently and on time, will prevent an exhausting, rushed feeling that often comes at the last minute before a major event. Encourage each Ministry Team member to fulfill his or her duties without further instruction from you, but let them know you are available to give any needed assistance.

8. Maintain the spirit of outreach.

Remember that you are planning an evangelistic outreach, not a church fellowship. Keep the focus on seeing men, women, boys, and girls won to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The people will be ready to enjoy a very exciting outreach if the Ministry Team leaders have faithfully

carried plans through to completion. The pastor should express his appreciation to each leader for their work. As church members enjoy the fruit of their labor and the grace of Jesus Christ, they will celebrate the personal victories witnessed in each service.

The general chairperson should work closely with the Follow-up Ministry Team in seeing that every person who made a commitment is contacted immediately and encouraged in additional steps of spiritual growth. The pastor has a great role in conserving the spirit of outreach. He should remind the people that outreach is not over because the event is over. The real results of the outreach will be felt in the congregation and in the community forever.

9. Evaluate the outreach event.

The pastor and/or general chairperson should lead the Evangelism council and/or Core Ministry Team in an honest evaluation of the outreach. Plans and goals used in outreach preparation should be evaluated after the event. Note things that worked well and ask why. Note things that were not as effective as planned. Decide which plans should be repeated and which should be omitted in future outreach meetings. Always determine what you can do to ensure the next event is even better than the last. File your evaluations in a secure place and review them carefully before you plan your next event.

10. Pray.

Above everything else, pray. When you seek to win people for Jesus Christ, you are invading Satan's territory. Expect spiritual warfare. Effectual, fervent prayer with heart intent upon righteousness gets results! Planning, promotion, and creativity are all key to us effectively accomplishing our work in events such as these. But God accomplishes His work as we pray.