

a FESTIVAL
of H  RVEST

A harvest of righteousness is
sown in peace for those who
make peace. —*JAMES 3:18*

PARISH EVENT KIT

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Index

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Introduction | 5 |
| Planning Suggestions | 6-9 |
| How to Trunk-or-Treat..... | 10-13 |
| Activities and Games | 14-34 |
| Food and Drink | 35-42 |
| Decorating Ideas | 43-48 |
| Devotional/Worship Ideas..... | 49-56 |
| Preparations for a Mass..... | 57-59 |

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Introduction

Halloween has become a popular holiday in the United States. Over 70% of all households participate. The favorite methods for households to celebrate is by passing out candy and carving pumpkins. We also decorate our houses, make and buy costumes, anticipate guests and plan menus. However, most children wear costumes and actually DO something for a very short time! Festival of Harvest is a unique church or school program that allows everyone to dress up in a Halloween costume, go trick-or-treating, and the fun lasts all afternoon or evening. The usual Halloween excitement is channeled into a positive faith-filled learning experience for everyone as awareness is drawn to the idea that we are all members of the family of God.

Halloween “Trunk-or-Treat” parties have been springing up all over. The difference between these parties and your Festival of Harvest Event is that you will be providing a safe place for your children to celebrate Halloween while bringing all members of your church family together to spend a fun afternoon or evening with one another.

Festival of Harvest could become an annual fall event for your church and school, much like Vacation Bible School is in the summer. Since everyone is filled with Halloween excitement anyway, why not use this energy to create happy memories that teach about Jesus’ love?

The challenge for organizers of Festival of Harvest will be the combination of the pure fun of Halloween with a reminder that we are Jesus’ children and a community of saints. With a little imagination and creativity, you will have children and adults alike celebrating WHOSE they are.

In recent times, more and more people are dressing up and enjoying Halloween. This is the perfect event for moms, dads, 50+s, teenagers and children to share activities including a Halloween costume parade. Arrange for a dinner such as hot dogs cooked outside around a fire or pizza delivery (to make it simpler). The high point of YOUR activities will be the devotions around a campfire or inside the church at night.

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Planning Suggestions

Plan Smart!

Your church or school Festival of Harvest Event can and should be fun, but also a time for celebrating being a child of God.

Make sure you plan for an intentional devotion time and that you advertise it. Having your pastor participate in the devotional time will create a special bond; however, as a community of faith, other church workers or leaders could lead the devotions just as easily.

On this special day/evening, children and adults will attend devotions in Halloween costumes. Though not “dressed conventionally,” they can still offer God prayer and praise. In fact, it will be memorable for most families and attendees.

Plan activities for ALL ages. Involve the teens and older children by asking them to help, giving them as much responsibility as you can. Asking them to help lead the devotions is a great way to involve them.

Don't forget the 50+ members of your parish. Ask for their help and advice in supervising, setting things up and running your events. Invite them to specifically sponsor a portion of the event that will be of special interest to children. This helps build community.

Note: If you plan to do the Living Saint Museum, you need to put that in action early, to find participants, costumes, and have them memorize their speeches.

Remember! Plan LOTS of things for everyone to do. Better to schedule too many things than not enough!

Get Organized

If you are using the school building for the Festival of Harvest, keep in mind that teaching the day of an event like this is often organized chaos!

- Inform your principal and teachers well in advance which rooms you will need, what you plan to do to the room (move furniture, remove chairs bring in a popcorn machine, etc.) and remember to put everything back in place when you are finished. You will be appreciated and loved for doing this.
- Try to keep interruptions to a minimum.
- Ask when you can get in the lunchroom, gym, church fellowship hall for set-up. These are areas that can be set up earlier in the day.

Committees

How many committees you need and what each will be responsible for will depend on your specific circumstances and the general plan you choose. You will need chairpersons for Registration and Publicity, Decorations, Finances and Shopper, Trunk-or-Treat, Festival of Harvest activities, Food, and Devotions/Worship, as well as volunteers for Set-up and Clean-up. (See below for committee ideas.)

Registration and Publicity

- Create forms for registration (include all pertinent information).
- Advertise in the church and school communication outlets.
- Put an ad or article in your local newspaper.
- Put signs out in front of your church or school. (Consult our Creative Communications catalog for an assortment of outdoor banners).
- Collect registrations and keep committee informed of numbers.

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How to Trunk-or-Treat (or Trick-or-Treat)

No Halloween celebration is complete without the opportunity for trick-or-treating, so plan to allow some time for it. However, instead of children moving from house-to-house, they will go either from car-to-car in your parking lot, or from family table-to-table in the gym or fellowship hall. (If you decide to trunk-or-treat in the parking lot, a back-up plan in case of rain is a great idea.)

For a successful Trunk-or-Treat, remember the following:

- Advertise in advance that people **MUST** sign up to participate and set a firm deadline for all cars to be in place.
- Consider advertising Contests for Best Costumes (child and adult) and Best Trunk Decorating. Remind people that it is *optional* to decorate cars and that being creative without being creepy is important.
 - Ideas for costume prize categories include:
 - Most Creative
 - Most Humorous
 - Cute and Sweet (girls)
 - Great Guys (boys)
 - Best Tiny Tot Costume

- Trunk decorating ideas include:
 - Festival of Harvest
 - Terrific Traditional Halloween
 - Top Tailgate
 - Crazy Car
 - Over the Top

- Be prepared to help with cost issues. Purchasing candy for 175-200 kids can feel costly. If it is a financial issue for a family, they should contact your chairperson and all requests should be kept confidential.

- Reserve the church/school parking lot for this activity as well as any other spaces or rooms you will need for the Festival of Harvest Event.

- Create a parking schematic listing the families and where they will park. Prepare copies to give families when they enter to park.

- On the day of the event, close the parking lot at least 1.5 hours early for set-up. Label the parking spots with their numbers or names.

- Make sure cars are parked safely.

- Before allowing children to begin moving from car-to-car for their treats (call this a Costume Parade and if you are having "prizes" this is when judging should happen), place barriers AND adults at entrances to parking lots to prevent cars from entering.

- Plenty of adult supervision will be necessary. You may want to contact your local police department to help you with this part of your event.

- After sufficient time for children to go from car-to-car, announce that this part of the party is over.

- At the end you will want to begin a new activity immediately, so you can channel all their energy and excitement in a positive way. Remember, they will have bags of their own candy, so provide plenty of places to throw away the wrappers!

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Activities and Games

Most of the included items can be used within a family, small groups or life groups, or as part of a larger, church-wide event.

Fall Fun Hat Game

Remind everyone. This game is NOT about who the loudest person is; it is about how one uses creative thinking to get a topic or idea across to their team.

The Hat Game

Divide the players into teams. It is best to have no more than 3 or 4 teams with no more than 3 or 4 players on each team. Try to mix up ages and abilities. If your group is larger, you can have three or four games going on at once.

Give everyone 4 small squares of blank paper and a pen. Have everyone write down a specific item they are thankful for on a piece of paper, fold up the pieces of paper (*without showing them to anyone*), and put them in the hat. To add to the list you can print the topics page below, cut the words apart, and place them into the hat. You will need to appoint a team “timekeeper” for each team, using a stopwatch or smart phone and a scorekeeper.

The objective: Teammates must work together to guess what the describer is describing.

The rules are simple: The describer pulls a piece of paper from the hat and describes it to his/her team without saying the word or what it sounds like. e.g., if the word on the paper was "shower" the describer could say, "This is where you wash, when you're not having a bath ... It's where water sprays out." The describer is allowed to "pass" one piece of paper within each turn and put it back into the hat.

The rest of the team guesses the word/phrase on the paper. Once they have guessed correctly, the paper is discarded and another pulled from the hat. The describer then repeats the process. The other teams keep score and watch the time, shouting "time's up" after 1 minute. The aim is to get through as many pieces of paper as possible within the time limit.

The team is awarded points equivalent to the number of words they described on their turn. Any pieces of paper that are "passed" are put back in the hat, as too are any pieces of paper that haven't been guessed when the describer's time is up.

A different member of each team is the "describer" on each turn.

Carry on until every paper has been described and declare a winning team.

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Food and Drink

Some of these items contain nuts, please be careful of what you provide and make those who have nut allergies aware of which items they can't have.

Snack Cornucopias

Things you will need for this:

- a good-size *extremely clean* (or new) trash can
- a heavy duty trash bag
- gloves (for food handling)
- a couple of food scoops or extra large serving spoons
- one box or bag of "dry goods" snacks from each family or small group*
- sugar cones (used for ice cream) enough for one for each person**

* The items cannot be individually wrapped, nor can it be anything that could spoil, like cheese. Due to allergies, it may be best to avoid any type of nuts. The kind of items that work best include: bags of (already popped) popcorn, M&M's, animal crackers, Cheez-Its, small pretzels, dried cranberries, Teddy Grahams, chocolate chips, Goldfish crackers, mini cookies, dry cereals, etc.

****Your church may decide to supply the sugar cones. If not, it is best to "assign" a type of snack (or cones) to various groups attending. This assures that you receive a wide variety of snack foods AND you can ensure that you receive enough ice cream cones for everyone.**

You will need several volunteers to oversee the "feast." Have a table ready to accept the snacks and to have cones at the ready. As groups arrive, have them bring their "gifts" to the table and leave them. Put your heavy duty trash bag into the clean can.

Have a volunteer set aside all the cones, as they will be used later. Open all bags and boxes of snacks. Making sure to use gloves, pour all the snacks into the trash bag, shaking the can to "mix" as you add ingredients. Once all ingredients are included, make sure to have your priest or minister offer up a prayer of thanks for the gathering of food and the gift of community. Here's an example:

Good and gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for gift of community we share today. Enable us to be beacons of hope for those around us. Use us to share the light of your Word with others, so that they may come to know you. Amen.

Using a scoop or large serving spoon, fill each "cornucopia" (sugar cone) with a scoop of trail mix. Encourage participants to form a line to pick theirs up!

Here are some ideas for the leftover mix: tie the bag up and send it to the next youth group meeting, bag it in plastic zip bags to be used in blessing bags for the homeless, or dropped off for shut in members. Make sure to include a note that you are thankful for them as well!

Oven-Baked S'mores

Here is what you need:

- mini Crust graham cracker pie crusts
- chocolate bars or chocolate kisses
- mini marshmallows

Using small graham pie crusts, fill each with five squares from a chocolate bar or three chocolate kisses. Cover the top with mini marshmallows. Bake at 350 for 8-10 minutes.

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Decorating Ideas

Need some easy decorating ideas that add a little spark of crafty creativity for fall? Check these out:

Selfie Station/Selfie Frame

Folks just cannot help themselves from taking pictures these days! Catch all the action of a fall event (or events) while adding to your church social media presence. Just include a Selfie Station, or in this case, a Selfie Frame to your event(s). Always include your Facebook group name, the church Twitter handle, website, and church/event hashtag. Challenge families, small groups/life groups, and various groups and committees to post images to their own pages as well. It is a great way to promote your upcoming events with 'free' advertisement to broaden your mission field.

Any backdrop will work for a Selfie Station. Create it just as you would a photo booth at a wedding or event. Use an overhead projector to enlarge one of the scenes below. Pin up an old sheet or line the wall with paper. Shine the design on it. Trace it, paint it, and you have got a backdrop. Add 3-D props such as a hay bale for a bench, pumpkins, even cornstalks and scarecrows. You will have a line of people waiting to take pictures in no time. You can even provide props such as hats, mustaches, scarves, or small signs to hold. Always paint or print your Facebook page name, church hashtag, etc. on the background somewhere.

Create your own Selfie Frame for any event your church or parish is hosting. They are easy to make. Since they are portable, it is easy to encourage kids of all ages to join in the fun!

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Devotional/Worship Ideas

Bible Verses:

You visit the earth and water it;
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide their grain,
for so you have prepared it.
You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.
You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with abundance.
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Psalm 65:9-13

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Preparations for a Mass

End the Event with an All Saints Family Mass

You might consider incorporating a Mass with the Festival of Harvest, especially if you are holding the event on or around All Saints Day.

One way to do that is to have Festival of Harvest activities begin on All Saints Day at the end of the school day (or with the cooperation of the school, perhaps after lunch). Parents and others are invited to come later. At the end of Festival of Harvest, everyone lines up in a large area or outdoors to form a procession into church for the Mass.

Begin the Event with the All Saints Family Mass

If you normally have a parish Mass in the late afternoon on All Saints Day, your Event can begin after that Mass. Invite everyone to come in costume, and a Halloween Parade could take place as people leave the church after Mass.

Begin your Event after a Regular Parish Saturday Evening Mass

This plan is perfect when Halloween actually falls on Saturday. When it does not fall on a Saturday, you can choose a Saturday close to the date of All Saints Day.