Christmas Evangelism Ideas

By Dan Martella

Sometimes Christmas feels like a 900 mph sleigh ride through a crowded mall. There's the Christmas shopping, Christmas decorating, Christmas lights, Christmas music, Christmas programs, Christmas dinners, Christmas parties, Christmas gift exchanges, Christmas cookies, Christmas pictures, and Christmas television shows.
I love Christmas - it's my favorite time of the year. The flurry of Christmas activities, however, can leave a lot of people feeling snowed under and eager to dig out. In their hearts they are looking for a lot more from the season than a peppermint latte, sore feet, and panic attacks. Deep in their hearts they are looking for the Reason for the Season. That is why Christmas is the best time of the year to share Jesus with our friends and communities. Here are a few best practices from churches across the North American Division to help with your Christmas evangelism this year. 

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**Early Bird Convention Rate Closes January 31**

The early bird rate of $199 for **CALLED**, a convention for pastors and their families, will close on January 31, 2015. This extends the rate for a few more weeks to accommodate conferences that prefer to post convention expenses to their 2015 budget. Regular rates apply after January 31:

- $199 Early-bird Pastor, $219 Regular Pastoral Rate;
- $169 Early-bird Spouse, $189 Regular Spouse Rate;
- $99 Early-bird Youth and Children, $119 Regular Youth/Children Rate

Attendees are invited to **register online** now.

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**Ideas, Events, Resources, Announcements**
Questions and Answers About Women's Ordination - Pacific Press has recently published a book to specifically help church members get to the heart of what has become a contentious subject. Martin Hanna and Cindy Tutsch's book is a clear and concise presentation on the subject of women's ordination that provides solid, biblically-based answers to 151 key questions. *Questions and Answers About Women's Ordination* is available through the [Adventist Book Center](https://www.adventistbookcenter.org/). It is also available as an [eBook](https://www.adventistbookcenter.org/eBooks/).

**Should Your Church Stop Having a Stand and Greet Time?** Many first-time church guests and introverted church members really don't like the stand and greet time on Sabbath morning, so much so that they may wait in the foyer until it is over before coming in, and very well may not come back again.

**When Technology Comes to Church:** In this November 18, 7:00 - 8:00 pm PST seminar, Chip Dizard and Rich DuBose will address two of the biggest challenges every church faces when using technology in ministry - 1. How to successfully surf the avalanche of new technologies that keep coming at us, and 2. How to find the people who are capable of using those tools once we have found them.

**Previous resource links:**

- General Conference Evangelism
- GenU.tv
- inSpire Songwriting Contest
- Five Trends Among the Unchurched
- "We Miss You" Greeting Cards
- Reach Out. Persist. Invite
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**After the Concert:** Invite your guests to an attractive reception after your church Christmas concert. The Albuquerque Three Angels Church in New Mexico does this by hosting a Tamale Fest where everyone has the opportunity to learn how to make green, red, and sweet tamales at different stations around the fellowship hall. The aroma of the tamales blends together with aroma of Ponche – a hot Mexican apple cider mixed with boiled fruits and spices – to fill the room with a festive smell. The kids are also given the opportunity to take a swing at the holiday piñata and scoop up all the candy they can get. After the concert events give members an opportunity to develop friendships with guests and invite them to Sabbath services, evangelistic meetings, small groups, health education classes, Pathfinders, and a host of other programs.

**Christmas Gifts:** Give your guests Christmas gifts to take home – A plate of cookies. A loaf of fruit bread. Something to read that will help them think through the deeper meaning of Christmas. Here are a few titles to get you going—

- **Messiah.** This 64 page sharing edition of Jerry Thomas’ *Messiah* takes readers from Jesus’ birth, early life, and ministry to the closing scenes of His life on earth. This book provides a great way to introduce Jesus to family, friends, and neighbors.

- **God’s Christmas Cards.** This little book shares with readers what God might write in His Christmas card to people like Tiger Woods, President Barack Obama, Jaycee Dugard, John Edwards, Bernie Madoff – and what God might write in His Christmas card to you! Each Christmas message is filled with the promise of hope and healing.

- **Unto Us A Child is Born.** Taken from the chapters about Christ’s birth in *The Desire of Ages*, this special supplement for *Signs of the Times* is perfect for sharing with family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, a church event guests.

These books can be purchased through the [Adventist Book Center](http://www.adventistbookcenter.com). Quantity pricing is available.

**Interactive Christmas:** Every Christmas season the Auburn Academy Church in Washington hosts a *Journey to Bethlehem*. This ministry began nine years ago with a wooden city built in the church parking lot. One thousand guests showed up the first year. Now there is a permanent city built in the field behind the church and 6,000 – 7,000 attend yearly. The program uses 350 costumed actors, and a support staff of 200 for hosting and refreshments. An additional 250 musicians share their ministry with the waiting crowds. Guests join a guide family that takes them through a 16-scene journey, telling the story of Jesus along the way. At the journey’s end, host families pray with their guests, offer encouraging literature, and invite them to upcoming to evangelistic meetings, Revelation seminars, marriage and parenting classes, personal finance classes, etc.
Drive-Through Christmas: Every Christmas the Roseville, California church sponsors a four evening Drive-Thru Nativity experience that takes guests on a circular tour through 10 scenes: The prophecy of the Messiah given to Daniel, the angel announcement to Mary, the arrival of Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, the angel announcement to the shepherds, the nativity scene, the wisemen, the story of Nicodemus, Jesus’ crucifixion, the resurrection, and the Second Coming. While listening to a CD narration of the story, guests drive by sets filled with painted backdrops, plants, props, lights, animals, and costumed actors. Several thousand people drive through each Christmas, many making this an annual part of their holiday celebrations. It is an opportunity for the church to serve the community, and the community in return has come to know the local Adventists as “The Nativity Church.”

Gather Around the TV: This year’s ABC Christmas television special, Peace on Earth, has been produced by the Voice of Prophecy. You can gather a group together at your church or in church member homes to view this one hour program featuring the Adventist Children’s Choir, King’s Heralds, and an inspirational message by Shawn Boonstra. Information on local listing times, promotional videos, and photographs are available through the Voice of Prophecy.

Community Service: The Christmas season offers an abundance of opportunities to serve the poor, homeless, and special needs members of our communities. Food baskets, gifts for kids, warm blankets and coats all make for meaningful gifts. This year the Healdsburg church in California is planning to take their Christmas party to the local Sunday evening community dinner provided for migrant workers, the homeless, and transients. A home-cooked Christmas feast, engaging conversations at table, holiday entertainment, and practical gifts will bring some holiday warmth to these special members of the community.

Other Creative Ideas: Here is a list of other creative ideas for Christmas friendship evangelism*—

- Fill Christmas stockings with fruit, candy, small gifts, and books. Deliver them to low income families in your area.
- Provide free, secure child care on Saturday nights and Sundays throughout the holiday season so parents can go shopping or attend company Christmas events.
- Go to the Christmas tree lots the day before Christmas and ask them to donate trees for needy families in the community. Then let the deliveries begin!
- Host a Christmas on a Budget seminar for the community with money-saving tips, creative DIY gift solutions, and a financial expert who can answer questions about credit card debt. Ask a family who has simplified their Christmases to talk about their experience.
- Host a gift fair for ADRA with shopping catalogs and booths where people can purchase chickens, cows, small business start-up loans, medical care, and education for people living in third world countries.
- Rent some space at your local mall to host your own Christmas shopper outreach with free gifts, free gift wrapping, free fun activities, and free holiday portraits. Set up tables and chairs that create a relaxing environment. Invite people to attend your Christmas services.
- Provide free holiday airport shuttle service for your community. Airport parking fees can sometimes amount to as much as $100. Time together in the car can provide great opportunities for conversation and outreach. Create a sign-up process and enlist a coordinator to track reservations and pickups.
- Go Christmas caroling through the church neighborhood. Share a small package of baked goods, some literature, and your favorite Christmas carols.
- Organize the photographers in your church to provide a free family portrait for those who don’t have the resources to do it themselves.
- Buy and deliver gifts for kids and food for families who are refugees or recent immigrants to your community and country.
- Put a church float in your community Christmas parade, followed by volunteers passing out bottles of water bearing the church’s name, logo, worship times, and contact information.
*These ideas have been adapted from the Christmas section of the Outreach Magazine website.
Blue Christmas

By Marla Hartman

At some point in our lives we all suffer loss – loss of a job, loss of a significant relationship, loss of a loved one, or loss of a life-long dream. As the holidays approach, scenes of laughing children and families happily gathered around the dinner table abound, amplifying our pain and loneliness. Suffering seems out of place at this joyful time of year, yet many in our congregations and communities deal with this reality every year.

A Blue Christmas Service, sometimes called the Longest Night Service, recognizes each individual's suffering and offers a place of understanding and compassion. While not a service to cheer up those in attendance, it is a reminder that because of Christ's entrance into the darkness of this world, we now have hope. A brief web search will net many programming ideas, but below are the key components the Fresno Sunnyside Church Blue Christmas Service uses each year:

- Warm, welcoming greeters
- Familiar carols playing softly in the background
- Lower lights than most sanctuary programs, use candle light for warmth if practical
- Welcome and acknowledgment of the pain that brought them to this service
- Prayer inviting God into our places of pain or loneliness
- Responsive reading (many available online)
- Congregational Christmas hymn ("Joy to the World" – Not a good selection here)
- A personal testimony of loss, grief and how that person is now coping - especially during the holidays. (This can be a reading such as The Mustard Seed available on the web. Our first year, we read the story and gave them a printed card that included a copy of the story and color image of a Christmas tree with an actual mustard seed affixed as the star)
- Invite each person to respond in a physical way. We have given each a small piece of blue paper to write the name of love one that died, the loss or a special prayer or thanksgiving. Each is then invited to place that in a clear acrylic ornament and come forward and hang it on the tree. Another simpler and less expensive option is to have each light a candle on a table up front for the same reasons.
- A special music number sung during the above activity
- A homily of hope
- Another responsive reading
- Closing prayer

Prior to the closing prayer an invitation is extended to anyone desiring personal prayer to come forward following prayer. All are invited to linger in the sanctuary as long as they would like, and then join us for light refreshments.

This service has been well received by church members for their own needs, as well as a place for them to invite friends and family who have suffered a loss. There are always new faces in the crowd, and a number that stay for prayer afterward. The Blue Service should be advertised to the community and other local churches through radio announcements, and placement on various community calendars as well as the typical bulletin, newsletter and banner announcements.

Marla Hartman is the director of ministries for the Fresno Sunnyside Church in California
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Robert knew it was a mistake because he was sentenced the year before to three years in an Ohio prison for drug possession and escape. When asked what he planned to do with the invitation, Robert responded rather sarcastically: “I am going to tell [the Vice President] that I’d be happy to attend, but he’s going to have to pull some strings to get me there.”

How many of us feel like this Ohio prisoner? Jesus is inviting us to the biggest banquet this universe has ever seen, but we feel unworthy, or that a mistake has been made. We think to ourselves, “Surely God wants nothing to do with me. I am not good enough to be invited to something as wonderful as eternity in heaven.” The fact of the matter is that God really did invite you, and no, it wasn’t a mistake!

Jonathan Martin is the associate pastor at East Pasco Seventh-day Adventist church in Zephyrhills, Florida

News Source: John Bacon (from staff and wire reports), "Guess Who's Not Coming to a Bush Dinner," USA Today (6-5-02) p. 3A