

## Reaching Your Community on Holidays

Are you someone who loves holidays? Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, birthdays; it could be any reason to celebrate! But what about when it comes to the church? How can your churches use holidays as an opportunity to reach your community?

The missionary, Amy Carmichael, was recorded as saying in Elizabeth Elliot's book, *A Chance to Die*, that she loved celebrations, whether it was a birthday, holidays, or arrival dates of Indian children into her orphanage. Special occasions were important for her to observe as they represent the importance of life, death, sacrifice, and the leading of God in our lives.

One example in the Bible of remembering a special occasion was when the children of Israel crossed the River Jordan into the Promised Land. In Joshua 4, God tells them to set up 12 stones in the river to be a memorial for the people of Israel forever. When their children would ask them, "What do these stones mean?," it would provide them with an opportunity to tell about what God had done for their people.

Jesus is also recorded as celebrating Jewish holidays. John 2:13 tells us that Jesus went to Jerusalem for Passover, and in John 5:1 we see Jesus in Jerusalem for another feast. Jesus was also invited to a wedding celebration in Cana in John 2, which shows how he joined in celebrating special occasions.

Verses like 1 Chronicles 16:8 say to "make known among their nations what He has done." It is important for us to remember what God has done. We have Christian holidays, like Easter and Christmas, but how can we use national holidays and family celebrations, such as birthdays and anniversaries for God's Kingdom?

Outreaches during holidays such as Christmas gifts given to children of the incarcerated with Angel Tree, shoebox gifts for Operation Christmas Child, and programs like free dinners for the needy on Thanksgiving are great ways to communicate the heart of Jesus. Paul the Apostle instructed church leaders in Galatians 2:10 to remember the poor as they did ministry. We want to care for the needy in our midst and help ease their burdens, as James 2:16 exhorts us to not only care for people spiritually, but to help them if they have physical needs.

For many years, our church in Longmont, Colorado hosted the largest Easter egg hunt in Boulder County. Our church was next to a park downtown, and we brought in bounce houses, did face painting, crafts, and more to connect with people as we shared the gospel with them and invited them to church. We knew that our church could not only serve a need in our community with the event, but it was an opportunity for us to fulfill our calling to "preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

In regard to national holidays, they can be used as an opportunity to share the gospel and to gather with others. Thanksgiving has been a favorite in our home. We like to invite people over who need a place to go. When we were missionaries in Hungary, our church, Calvary Chapel Debrecen, made Thanksgiving dinner an outreach for families and friends to eat dinner and hear the gospel, and people were intrigued by this American holiday. Pastor Zsolt Bodogán would make pumpkin pies for weeks in preparation!

Halloween is an American holiday that some families choose not to participate in, but others like to use it as an opportunity to share the Gospel and connect with neighbors. Churches may have their own celebrations, to which they invite unchurched people to come and meet Christian people and hear the gospel. In our home, we decorate and dress up, and look forward to going around the neighborhood to knock on doors. My kids are excited for the candy, and we

are excited to talk to our neighbors and give out church invitations and gospel tracts. For someone with a heart to reach your neighbors, you have to love the fact that Halloween is the one day of the year when you can knock on any door in your neighborhood, and your neighbors will answer and connect.

Holidays have challenges though, as they may stir up loneliness or remind people of bad experiences. Some people feel like holidays are just extra stress and they do not enjoy them. Christmas is one of the holidays that bring high expectations at church for special music, extra events, and beautiful decorations. “One man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord” (Romans 14:5-6). Regardless of how one feels about holidays, we can use these days as opportunities to share our faith. People are much more likely to come to church at Christmas and Easter, and its a chance we have to reach them with the love of Christ!

Use these cultural moments for the spreading of the Gospel! Whatever you do, do for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31), whether you embrace holidays with vigor or if you just get through the season!