

My Three Point Christmas List

Sheryl Slous – CAN BDA YOUTH Children's Ministry Consultant

Reverse Advent Challenge: In addition to your family's chocolate Advent calendar, David's tea countdown, or daily mini-gift opening, why not add a challenge this year? Work together to donate a daily item of food, a toy, or a household item to your food bank or thrift store. Maybe deliver a treat to a different neighbour on your street each day. Or brainstorm daily ways to contribute to the needs of others. Focus on giving rather than receiving. As the calendar empties, pantry shelves and hungry bellies are filled, and hearts are overflowing with the joy and love that is Christmas. Maybe you want to take on this project with your youth group or children's ministry - encourage everyone to participate and collect the items on each Advent Sunday.

A Gift of Worship: Help your church families focus on worship on Christmas day by offering a Gift of Worship kit that leads them through a family friendly reflection on the true meaning of Christmas, to be shared in the midst of gift opening, or even around the table before or following Christmas dinner. Give a small box or gift bag to families on Christmas Sunday/Christmas Eve that contains an interactive worship focus - readings, scripture, carols to sing, small items to be used as object lessons, a themed tree ornament to place, etc. The idea is that this "gift" is placed under the tree with the rest of the presents and whenever it comes out during the opening of gifts, the family pauses for a short time to focus on worship and the real reason they are celebrating today.

Themed Family Christmas Breakfast: Invite corps families, families that attended summer camp, family services clients, daycare families, and the neighbourhood to all join together for a themed family Christmas breakfast! Be creative in a theme that is a ton of fun but also helps you communicate the Christmas story and the true reason your church is celebrating together. How about a red carpet gala breakfast where you celebrate that "A Star is Born"? Or "Breakfast a la King" where you join the three wisemen in their search for baby Jesus? Willy Wonka's Great ADVENTure, where breakfast at Wonka's Chocolate Factory helps families focus on others ahead of themselves this Christmas? The possibilities are endless. Create appealing advertising, serve good food, and create a family experience that will encourage people to keep coming back to your church. Strategically seat church families with new visitors so they can get to know each other. Table games and activities, door prizes, and carol singing make a fun morning for all ages. Have students serve breakfast, take family photos which are mailed or emailed back to families via contact information gathered during the meal, distribute information about your church and your youth & children's ministry, and invite people back to your Advent services or other family friendly Christmas events going on at your church.

Valerie Pavey – CAN BDA YOUTH Children’s Ministry Consultant

The 4 Cs of Christmas (Cookies, Cider, Crafts & Carols): This event provides an opportunity to welcome families into your church building and provides them with an opportunity to get to know you in a relaxed way. As families arrive they are welcomed and registered and their contact information is gathered so that you can follow-up with them after the event. Families then move through at least four different stations: a couple of Christmas Craft stations, a photo booth station, and a cookie decorating station. Then they are invited to participate in a lively carol sing time that includes a simple, yet creative telling of the Christmas story. The event can end with a snack time of Christmas cookies (baking) and hot cider (or hot chocolate and cold drinks for the kids). Family Christmas photos from the photo booth are e-mailed out to the families after the event with an invitation to come back and join you for Sunday worship.

Things to consider:

- Plan, organize and advertise in advance
- Decide if this will be an morning or afternoon or evening event
- Decide if you want families to pre-register for this event or to just show up if they are available
- Decide if you want to run event as stations or have families seated around table in your meeting room (Stations could include 2 different crafts and cookie decorating, snack time, then everyone joins together for carol sing and the Christmas story)
- Choose one or two crafts for families to work on together. These could be ornaments or a nativity keepsake. Choose crafts that families will want to keep. (Orientaltrading.com has pre-package craft kits or Pinterest has 1000s of creative ideas to choose from)
- Decide if you want to have gingerbread cookies or houses at your cookie decorating station
- Decide if your food items will be served to the tables, or if you will have the families line up and select their choices from a food table. Have Hot Apple Cider (Hot Chocolate) and a variety of Christmas cookies and baking.
- If possible arrange for someone to be the photographer and to create a creative digital picture frame for the family photos. The frame should include your church logo as a reminder of your church and the event. Photos can be emailed or printed and mailed to the families.
- Be sure to decorate your church in a way that says “we love families”
- Plan a lively carol sing offering a variety of Christmas carols (divide a song like “The Twelve Days of Christmas” amongst the different tables to encourage everyone’s involvement in the singing)
- If possible arrange for live accompaniment to the carol sing

- Have a group of children or teens from your church dress up as the main characters of the Christmas Story as someone reads it aloud (use a child friendly version) (rehearse ahead of time) OR use a children's book such as "This is the Stable" by Cynthia Cotten, "Alabaster's Song: Christmas through the Eyes of an Angel" or "The Crippled Lamb" by Max Lucado. Have teens or children in costume to help dramatize the story or create PPT pictures from story book.)
- Be sure to have an invitation available to give out to families inviting them back for your Christmas Eve Service and Sunday worship

"The Star" Christmas Family Movie Night: This dinner and a movie event can provide you with an opportunity to connect with families leading up to Christmas. It is an event that can be quite simple in its execution or you can get more creative and turn it into a large event. "The Star" movie that is in theatres is an animated telling of the Christmas story from the perspective of the animals in the stable. (Feel free to check out Focus on the Family's Plugged In movie review). A family movie night can simply include dinner and then traveling to the local theatre to enjoy the movie together or you can make it into something more. You can provide a simple family dinner, a craft time, a photo booth, watching the movie together and finishing with a short devotional.

Things to consider:

- In advance, check in with your local (or nearby) movie theatre to find out what is the best way to purchase tickets for a group in advance
- OR Visit with theatre manager and arrange a possible private viewing of the movie for your group
- Have families sign up ahead of time and purchase tickets in advance to ensure enough seats
- Arrange for church members to help prepare a meal to be shared with those who attend
- Decorate your building so that it says "families are welcome here!"
- Invite families to your church building for a simple meal (chili and hotdogs, soup and sandwiches, etc.) (Or you can go big and host a full cooked meal)
- Be sure to have some Christmas baking and Hot Apple Cider available
- After the meal travel to the theatre and watch movie
- If possible have a short Christmas devotional thought and prayer with your guests before leaving the theatre. (Devotional could be based around Matthew 1 and 2 – the magi following the star to Jesus)
- Have a well created/printed invitation to give out to families as they leave inviting them to your Christmas Eve service and any other events including Sunday worship

- OR If possible to do a matinee version of the movie, invite the families back to the church afterwards for a meal, devotional thought and to make a Christmas Star craft together as a reminder of the event and the Christmas story

If you like the idea of a Family Movie night and “The Star” is not showing in your area, choose an appropriate DVD and host the movie in your church building or if you need more space consider renting a room at a local community centre – be sure to make lots of popcorn!

Family Christmas Programs from Group Publishing: Similar, but different from the 4 Cs of Christmas are Group Publishing’s packaged family Christmas programs. Group has done all the creative planning for you, has laid out all of the steps you need to take to successfully execute your event, and they have two options for you to choose from. Group’s two events will help you invite families into your church this Christmas season. They provide an opportunity for families to meet other families, to work together on keepsakes, to hear the Christmas story in creative ways and to meet their neighbours who are a part of your church family.

Here are the two options they have available:

1. Keepsake Christmas: Making Memories at the Manger
 - This kit helps you create a one-hour interactive program
 - Families arrive and register and meet their keepsake coach
 - Families sit together at table with a keepsake coach and one or two other families
 - Families sit at their table while cast members tell the Christmas story from a stage (they will hear from Mary, Joseph and an angel, they’ll learn about Jesus name and discuss where their own names originated)
 - Each guest will make a Christmas keepsake to take home and keep
 - Event ends with a family photo opportunity at the Fireside Photo station
 - Doesn’t require a large number of volunteers/staff to run it
 - Everything you need is in the kit (can be ordered through Group.com or ChristianBooks.com or a local Christian bookstore), and additional craft kits are also available
 - You can download the Director’s Guide Overview for free to learn more!
2. A Night in Bethlehem: Jesus Came to Save Us
 - This is a two-hour family event where families wander through bustling Bethlehem

- Families will move together through the 8 stations and meet the shopkeepers of Bethlehem and hear about the night Jesus was born
- There is opportunity for families to make keepsakes as reminders of the Christmas story at the stations
- One station includes a Village Photographer who will take photos of the families for them to keep
- The event kit has been put together in such a way that you won't require large numbers of volunteers/staff to man the stations
- Everything you need to plan the event is included in the kit along with samples (can be ordered through Group.com or ChristianBooks.com or a local Christian bookstore)
- You can download the Director's Guide Overview for free to learn more!

Kits are \$69.99 US, additional resources are also available – or check them out and let your imagination loose!

Major Carson Decker – DYS Maritimes Division

Shepherd on the Search – Family Advent Activity: Embark on a family journey and find CHRIST in Christmas! During the Advent season, begin reading the story of your shepherd's timeless journey in a beautifully illustrated interactive children's book, and let the fun begin every day as you hide the shepherd and children find him in a new place along the search.

The shepherd's journey begins anew every Christmas season and ends on Christmas Day as he finds his way to the manger.

Daily Adventure Activities – Downloadable – www.shepherdonthesearch.com

Family Christmas Light Scavenger Hunt: Looking for a fantastic activity to do with church family and friends or community's holiday season? Host a Christmas Light Scavenger Hunt. Pass out invites in advance. On the day of the event, pass out a Christmas Light Scavenger Hunt List (families will travel throughout town, taking pictures of the listed items). Provide a time when everyone is expected to be back at the meeting place (one hour exactly from the time that you run to your cars and start the hunt). Once everyone is back, compare lists and select winners. Prizes will be awarded. (Prize Ideas: Christmas Movie and Popcorn, Can of Gourmet Hot Cocoa, Christmas Book, etc.) After prizes are given out, warm up with a hot chocolate bar & cookies. Have people share their pictures. Be sure to take a group photo before the event is over.

Spreading Christmas Joy: Challenge your families to spread Christmas cheer around your community by delivering traditional Christmas goodies. Provide a list of homebound church members, or challenge families to select six people in their neighborhood. Have families deliver each household a paper bag of hard candies, oranges, and apples, gingerbread cookies, etc. and linger to chat for a couple minutes or sing carols.