7 ideas for the best All Saints Day party ever

It’s no wonder kids love Halloween: they get permission (and even help) from the adults in their lives to dress up, pretend to be someone more powerful or scary or grown up than they are, go out after dark . . . and eat lots of candy.

For Christians, though, Halloween is more than a costume party; it is All Hallow’s Eve, the warm-up act for the main event the next day, All Saints Day.

Of course, Catholics celebrate the lives of the saints all year long. The lives of the saints are an endless source of wisdom and inspiration for how to live out the Gospel in the particular circumstances of our every day lives. Plus, they are visible signs of Christ’s triumph over sin and death—a bit of light, and a bit of good news, in a world that often seems all too dark and scary and sad.

What better way to celebrate All Saints Day than with a party! If your parish doesn’t already sponsor an All Saints Day party, consider organizing one. The following ideas are geared toward a parish-based party, but you can adapt them to a neighborhood or home-based party.

1. Keep it simple!

Your pastor and parish staff will (probably) be supportive if you and a few other parents take the lead. If that line makes you cringe (because, Lord knows, you’ve got lots of extra time to organize a party), let go of the idea that this is going to be a showcase party worthy of Pinterest—and especially let go of the idea that you are going to be “the host,” or “in charge.” Make it clear that this is going to be a community

celebration, and a whole-community effort. Here's what to do:

1. Check with parish staff to see whether you can have space for the party, and whether the parish will announce it
2. Get together with a few collaborators
3. Choose a date and time
4. Decide what is going to happen at the party
5. Put together a bulletin announcement, and request a pulpit announcement as well
6. In your announcement, tell people what to bring: food, costumes, pumpkins to carve, etc.
7. Roll with it—as with anything involving kids, expect spills, tantrums, and diversions. It's okay! The beautiful thing about time is that the hassle around these celebrations tends to drop away, leaving only good memories—or at least stories to laugh over.

Keep it simple!

2. Make it a potluck

Don't try to provide all the food yourself; make your party a potluck. Better yet, make your party a saints-themed potluck to amp up the fun and interest. Invite families to share a dish or treat that is related to their favorite saint. This might be a food that is traditionally eaten on the saints' feast day, or a food that somehow evokes the spirit of the saint. You might make Polish sugar cookies to celebrate St. Stanislaus, for example, or Irish soda bread for one of the Irish saints; or, you might try a themed cupcake (devil's food with a "sword" for St. Michael, rose-topped cupcakes for St. Therese of Lisieux). There are literally hundreds of recipe possibilities. You can refer your guests to these online sources (all a quick Google search away):

- Catholic Cuisine

- Catholic Culture > Liturgical Year > Recipes
- The Catholic Foodie
- My Catholic Kitchen

3. Get creative with costumes

Okay, we're just going to say it: Religious habits make boring costumes, which makes dressing up as a saint for your All Saints' Day party a little challenging. Kudos to all our holy heroes who embraced poverty for the sake of Christ, but there are only so many brown robes and rope belts to go around.

Unless your child has a special devotion to a particular saint, you might want to expand your definition of appropriate "All Saints Day" costumery. Here are some ideas:

- **Your child, the saint.** All of us are called to be saints. In fact, your children are probably going to be saints someday (hard to believe, but yes!), so why not let them dress up as the saints they will someday be? This boils down to letting them dress up as what they want to be when they grow up—a fireman, astronaut, dancer, or whatever. All you need to do for a saintly twist is talk to your child about how his or her chosen "grown up identity" can be an expression of holiness. Fire fighters rescue people, and dancers point us to beauty, which leads us to God.
- **Martyred saints.** Certain teens might be more enthusiastic about dressing up as a martyred saint. Think of the possibilities! Saints have been martyred and mutilated in just about every way imaginable. Yes, the kid walking around without eyeballs or with a sword through her neck might offend some sensibilities, but there's an important lesson there, too: We Christians have a long tradition of suffering for Christ, and laughing in the face of death. The martyred saints are

entirely in the spirit of the holiday.

- **Patron saints**. Make a connection between your child's costume and the traditional patronage of the saints. Does your child want to dress up as a juggler or an actor? There's a patron saint for that.
- **The many varieties of angels.** For the child who wants to go as something really exotic (like a monster or a mermaid), suggest creating a totally unique angel costume. Although angels are depicted with white robes and wings in popular culture, in fact these spiritual creatures have no body; any physical description we have of them from the Bible is entirely symbolic. And what descriptions! Check out Ezekiel 1:4-14, for instance, which describes angels with four wings, four faces, the legs of a calf, spewing fire and lightning. But you don't need to limit yourself to what's in the Bible. If angels are messengers of God whose physical appearance communicates something about the glory of God, what might an angel appearing to your child look like? Use your imaginations to think up symbols that can be incorporated into an angel costume like no other.
- **Find a few servants of God.** If we're lucky, each of us knows a handful of people who strike us as particularly holy. They may or may not be dead yet, and they probably aren't officially recognized by the Church . . . but on the other hand, the tradition of honoring holy people has popular roots. In the first thousand years or so of the Church, saints were largely recognized as a result of ongoing popular devotion. If your child has a favorite "example of holiness," in might be fun to dress up as that person. If the person is still alive, be sure to send pictures!

4. Do fun games and activities

What would a party be without games? Here are some

possibilities:

- **Bobbing for apples.** In this game, kids use their teeth to grab an apple bobbing in a basin of water while holding their hands behind their backs. Set out towels to mop up the inevitable splashing. If traditional bobbing for apples seems too germy, use individual basins or mixing bowls of water, one per kid. Or suspend the apples from the ceiling with string. Be sure to follow up with apple treats! Have a mechanical apple peeler on hand, and sprinkle cinnamon sugar on top of the resulting apple spiral; or make caramel apples with the kids' prizes.
- **Who's that saint?** Play a guessing game, ala Twenty Questions, based on each person's saint costume. Guessers ask questions about the saint, which the saint answers "yes" or "no." This can be played as a large group, with one saint at a time, or as a mixer, with kids trying to guess as many other saints as possible in a given amount of time. Play this game early in the party.
- **Cupcake decorating.** Provide unfrosted cupcakes, a few cans of frosting, and lots of cake decorating options. Check out the Catholic food websites listed above for Catholic cupcake theme possibilities.
- **Folk dancing.** For this activity, you will need someone who knows some traditional folk dances, as well as an MP3 player or another source of music. Have your folk dance expert teach the whole group how to do some simple traditional dances .
- **Christian-themed pumpkin carving contest.** Your younger kids might want to carve traditional jack o' lanterns, but challenge your older kids to try some designs that fit better with All Saints' Day. If you use a paper template to guide your carving, then the design possibilities are endless. The Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descending as a dove, crosses, angels,

even the profiles of saints . . . if you can find a picture of it (or even a coloring page), you can trace it onto your pumpkin by pricking an outline through the paper with a pin or sharp knife.
- **Bonfire**. If you can be outside, a bonfire opens up all sorts of possibilities, including popping popcorn and roasting nuts.

These are just a few ideas; you can adapt any fun party game for your event.

5. Imagine the saint you want to be

Use the opportunity of the party to encourage kids (and adults) to imagine the saint they want to become. Here are a few fun ways to do that; in each case, it will help to provide finished examples as inspiration for your guests:

- **Saint Me Outlines.** On large pieces of paper (or using chalk on the ground), have guests trace an outline of themselves, then fill in the outline with words and symbols describing the kind of saint they would like to become. You can provide some prompting questions: What will your primary virtues be? What great things will you accomplish for Christ? How will you be martyred (if at all)?
- **Make a coat of arms**. Give each guest a large piece of poster board cut into the shape of a shield, and encourage guests to create their own coat of arms. (Google "Ecclesiastical Heraldry" for examples and ideas.)
- **Saint Me Placemats and Hagiographies**. Purchase blank paper place mats from a dollar discount store; write the name of each guest on the place mat after "St." (so, "St. Michelle," "St. Franklin," etc.). Encourage kids to decorate their place mats with pictures and/or words

describing the saint they aspire to be.

It might be helpful to incorporate a teensy bit of catechesis into this activity. You can remind your guests that:

- The saints were real people with real problems and faults, just like you and me. We remember them today because they are good examples of how to follow Christ in the world.
- Although we remember in a special way the saints whom the Church has held up as public examples of virtue and holiness, anyone who is united with the Holy Trinity is a saint.
- We can ask the saints to pray for us ("intercede" for us) just as we would ask any other member of the Church to pray for us, because death doesn't break the bonds of those who are brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Every single one of us is called to be a saint! We become saints by giving ourselves to God the Father, with the help of the grace of Jesus the Christ, poured out in the Church through the Holy Spirit. We don't need to be perfect in ourselves to be saints; we only need to let God live in our hearts.

6. Pray it up

Finally, incorporate some prayer into your party. Any formal prayer will probably work better before the kids are all sugared up and worn out. Here are some prayer ideas for your All Saints Day party:

- **Incorporate Mass**. In the United States, All Saints Day is a Holy Day of Obligation. If your party will be on the Feast of All Saints, hold it before or after Mass.
- **Pray the litany of the saints.** What could be more appropriate for All Saints Day than the litany of the saints? Find it online or in *Catholic Household*

Blessings and Prayers. You can find a sung version in your parish hymnal.

- **Pray a rosary for the poor souls.** It is traditional to pray for the poor souls in purgatory on All Souls Day; you can pray the sorrowful mysteries for this intention at the beginning of your party.
- **Make a candlelight procession of the saints.** Begin your party with a procession of the saints, singing an appropriate song from your hymnal (or "When the Saints Go Marching In.") If your party will be after dark, step outside to symbolize how the light of the saints banishes the darkness. If giving kids in costumes live flames scares you, there's no reason why you can't use flashlights (cover the beam with colored tissue paper) or artificial candles.
- **Visit the church graveyard.** If possible, lead your procession to your parish graveyard to pray for the people buried there, and all the dead. The Book of Blessings contains a ritual for visiting a cemetery; you can find an adapted version in Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers.
- **Pray for the dead.** If you don't have a graveyard handy (!), put up poster boards and encourage guests to write down the names of deceased loved ones (or better yet, post pictures). Incorporate all the names into your prayer before the potluck meal, or another service.

7. Tell the stories of the saints

We have some very interesting characters in the communion of saints—men, women, and children who lived in every time and place, and in every sort of circumstance. What they had in common, though, was a love of Christ and the Church. The example of how they lived out the Gospel amid the ups and downs of everyday life is a good reason to tell some of the more interesting stories of these "holy heroes" at your All

Saints' Day party. You can read from any number of good books about the saints, or choose a story from this or another website and turn it into a simple play for the kids. You can find lots of stories in our on our Saints page.

Learn more

For more party ideas, as well as background on the history of these holidays, see Family Celebration Ideas for Halloween, All Saints Day and All Souls Day at Catholic Culture.