

WELCOME to Our Home

Sharing God's Love Through Your Holiday Open House

Ahhh...Christmas. Visions of snow gently falling, a warm fire glows in the fireplace while friends and family gather to celebrate. Norman Rockwell himself couldn't completely do the season justice. But it is so easy to get caught up in the season for the wrong reasons, isn't it? Even Christian homes can lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas. Yet somehow the meaning of that very first Christmas still finds its way into our hearts. Why? Because we know that little baby, born in a manger has transformed lives.

Yet for many families, perhaps even the family living right next door to you, Christmas is no more than a season of parties and buying sprees. And when the season is over, they find themselves financially depleted and spiritually bankrupt.

Isn't it time we open our doors to them and invite them to experience the Christ and the Christmas we know and love? Why not start a tradition this year with an open house?

Like any social event, success begins with planning. Pull out your December calendar and take a look at your holiday schedule. No doubt office

parties, school activities and church festivities will narrow the number of available dates.

Prayerfully consider your guest list. Who do you know that needs to hear the Good News of Jesus and the reason for the season? Be sure to include neighbors and coworkers. Include casual acquaintances, like all those moms and dads who kept you company on the bleachers during soccer or basketball or the parents of your children's friends at school. If you have Christian neighbors who are friends, consider having them attend or even cohost your open house. Not only can they offer spiritual support, but they may be willing to share expenses or know of someone who would benefit from attending. Depending on the number of guests you invite, allow about two or three hours for your open house.

Keep the menu simple. A buffet style table full of finger foods sets a relaxed mood and invites people to linger. Make sure your selection is also kid-friendly. Most of what you offer could be prepared in advance and disposable plates, napkins and cups reduce clean-up time afterward. Remember food and decorations are just a small part of your open house.

Since your objective is to share the true meaning of Christmas, consider decorating your table and home around a Christian theme such as "Jesus - Light of the World." Christian hospitality and the opportunity to share a positive testimony of your faith are, by far, the most important elements. In the weeks ahead of your open house have your family pray for each person on your guest list by name. Ask God to help each member of the family be a reflection of His love and hospitality. Pray your home will be a place of acceptance, comfort and unconditional love.

As your guests arrive ask them to sign your guest book. If there will be several children attending, consider having a separate room where they can watch a video. The Veggie Tales "The Toy that Saved Christmas" is an excellent choice. The kids will love it and parents will likely visit longer if their children are not bored and clinging to their side!

As you make plans to share your faith remember friends are more receptive if you don't hit them over



the head with a bible or preach them a sermon. There are many subtle ways to share Christ with them.

Perhaps you might want to gather all the children around in a circle on the floor to tell them a story. Read Luke 2:1-20. . You may want to have a nativity set close to you so you can illustrate the story with the characters. Afterward, share a short story of what Christmas truly means to you and your family. Emphasize why God sent Jesus to earth and end by reading John 3:16.

Another great way to subtly share Christ is by singing selected Christmas carols. Choose carols that reflect God's love for people such as "What Child is This?", "Joy to the World" "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" and "O, Come All Ye Faithful".

Don't let your guests leave empty handed. Giving is the essence of Christmas. Just as God gave His Son to show His love for humanity, we have the opportunity to share a gift that represents our love for our neighbors. The gift doesn't have to be expensive. Nothing says "you're special" more than a lovingly crafted present. Even the smallest remembrance will be appreciated.

A simple candle adorned with a ribbon can reinforce your theme of "Jesus - Light of the World". You may want to attach a small tag to the candle thanking them for coming

and wishing them a blessed Christmas. Adding your family name and phone number may encourage them to call with questions. Place a festive basket with your gifts by the door to help you remember to give them to your guests as they leave.

After the holidays, you can send them another card thanking them again for attending and asking them to join you at a church service by using the information gathered in your guest book.

Well, you've poured your heart out in prayer to the Lord and asked Him to use you as His instrument. His presence fills your home and you know the open house is bound to be a success. Now, as the doorbell rings, the only thing left to do is open the front door and say, "Welcome to our home!"

This article has been adapted from an article originally written by Kathy Chapman Sharp. Kathy now serves as Director of Publishing at the International Mission Board.



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