



### Crossing the Threshold: Simple ideas for Christmas outreach activities

#### A time of opportunity

Christmas is one of the few remaining national holidays that provides an opportunity to share the Christian message, to introduce people to the life of Christ and to offer experiences of faith. This is why Christmas outreach is such a central part of the Crossing the Threshold initiative. It is the time of year when many non churchgoing Catholics will visit their local church. Christmas activities offer an opportunity for faith rediscovery and reconnection.

#### Know your local Christmas culture – two considerations

1) What things are already being offered by Churches Together and / or other local churches? Perhaps contact them to ask what is already being organised to help your parish evangelisation team discern if it should offer something new to fill a gap in provision. It's important to ensure that your parish is featured in the joint Churches Together Christmas card that may go out to households in your local area.

2) Secondly, know the dominant Christmas culture – explore what people's existing associations with Christmas are, identify the things that are already part of their seasonal psyche and tap into that creatively.

#### Starting points

1) Verbally, visually and location wise **meet people where they are at** (go to the local shopping centre). Observe and tap into dominant and existing Christmas associations.

2) Identify activities that your parish can offer which are distinctive – e.g. live nativity scenes, carols and so on. Consider offering **something that no one else in your area is offering**. Be confident in the treasures of the Catholic Faith - share the basic Gospel message and use our beautiful signs & symbols. Make the most of our liturgies.

#### Ten Simple Ideas For Christmas Outreach

1) **Music & Sounds** – make the most of Christmas carols and always offer refreshments and hospitality. Consider carefully the location of your carol service – in church, school, in the town square, shopping centre. Be creative and maybe forge a link with an existing local choir to work with you to prepare a repertoire. Think about where people are already at and go to them! One radical evangelisation tool is a flash mob – e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBf-Kv7c9QM> If you have a church bell do use it – a ringing bell proclaims that Christmas is approaching (calling people to church) and / or that it has already come! If your church has a bell, use it and perhaps appeal for new bell-ringers in your local area as another way of building relationships with people.

2) **Christmas Film Marathon** - there are a large number of classic Christmas films that people love to watch again and again. You may choose to put on a Christmas film bonanza, providing nibbles and drinks. It may be that your local library might be willing to host it and / or your local cinema? This is an unthreatening way of inviting people to engage with you and the Christmas story. Relevant permissions will need to be explored in terms of possible licensing for a public showing of a film.

**3) Christmas tree** – make the most of this and appeal to beauty. If there is a town tree unveiling, be present and visible when the lights are turned on as a joyful Christian community. Another idea is to offer an Angel Tree where each bauble on the tree represents a child, and parishioners are invited to sponsor a child in need by donating to a children's charity.

**4) Sponsor a nativity scene** - fewer and fewer places have nativity scenes in their market places or central squares. Either as an individual parish, or with Churches Together, this is something that you might choose to sponsor in your local area, in liaison with the Council, to ensure that some kind of nativity scene is visible. You could build an outreach activity around this, handing out invitation cards on Saturdays in Advent perhaps? You may also choose to invite parishioners to put up nativity scenes in their homes or in front windows for neighbours and visitors to see, and also to only send religious Christmas cards.

**5) Schools outreach – meet the real Santa – St Nicholas**

Many parishes have schools next door or close-by. It might be that parishioners offer to go in to the school to read the Christmas story and to explain it, and / or to introduce the children to St Nicholas, who is regarded by many as the real Santa. The volunteers could take the opportunity to invite the children and their family to the parish carol service or Christmas Mass. Perhaps sweets and a holy picture could be given to the children too as a gift from the parish? You may even want to host, as a parish, a birthday party for Jesus at the start of the school holidays. Have a cake, play birthday and Christmas games, share the story of Jesus' birth, and talk about His life.

**6) Free gifts to shoppers** - people love free gifts. Everyone wraps presents at Christmas, so everyone needs sellotape and often forgets to buy it. As shoppers come out of the shops with presents in hand, offer them a free roll of tape with a parish contact or invitation card. If you have a large supermarket close to your parish it might be something to consider doing there, having received the necessary permissions from the Council or shop manager depending on where you choose to stand. If you're doing the activity stood on ground owned by the supermarket, for example, you should ask the permission of the store manager to be there, even if you're outside the store.

**7) Service** - you might give witness through service – free Christmas gift-wrapping at your local supermarket, for example. A few church members could offer to wrap gifts. No charge is made. They would be equipped with several different styles of paper as well as some decorations and tape of course. People can be very appreciative of having one less thing to do. Hot chocolate or free tea / coffee is appreciated by most. Serve this whilst the people are having their gifts wrapped and engage in conversation, giving them an invitation card to the Christmas services. Every parishioner could be invited to do something in service of his or her neighbour on the same day.

**8) Bespoke invitation materials** – an ecumenical source is <http://www.cpo-online.org.uk> The Home Mission Desk of the Catholic Bishops' Conference also provides ready-made materials for download at: <http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/Home/Featured/Features-2013/Christmas-and-New-Year/Christmas-Outreach/Resources/%28language%29/eng-GB> The hope is that the posters are put on display in a breadth of different places – every parishioner can be given one to put in their car or window. The invitation cards are designed to be given to someone personally. So it might be that every parishioner is given three cards to invite people to the Christmas services. All the Bishops' Conference materials feature [www.comehomeforchristmas.co.uk](http://www.comehomeforchristmas.co.uk), which is a dedicated online welcome area for non-churchgoing Catholics.

**9) Illuminations** – consider buying a lit nativity scene for display. Rope light sets are available from a number of outlets. They need to be big enough to be seen by passing traffic. The larger the better and perhaps just three figures – Mary, Jesus and Joseph – for maximum visual impact.

**10) Local media** – do forge links with your local radio station and newspaper. They may be interested in covering your event as a news story and / or you may want to put an advert in the local paper.

## **Follow up**

Whatever outreach initiative you do, consider what next? How will you encourage those that might come to a Christmas service or event to stay in contact? Some events to advertise at the Christmas services might be:

- Welcome – a New Year cheese and wine evening - “Come and meet Father and find out more about what the parish has to offer your family.”
- “Come and See” gathering – offer a church tour, a time of prayer, a children’s activity and a warm welcome and refreshments.
- Offer a bespoke programme for non churchgoing Catholics like KIT, Landings, Alpha, CaFE or similar – which is a larger commitment.
- Make the most of the Feast of Epiphany with crown making for children and other activities.

## **CROSSING THE THRESHOLD: SIMPLE THINGS – DONE WELL – WITH LOVE**