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**PREPARING FOR A CHRISTMAS MUSICAL**

*By Dr. Kacy Palmore*

As known, the purpose of the church is to win the lost, baptize them, and make them disciples. There are many methods that a church can use to reach this goal. Of course, one of the main ones is door-to-door soulwinning. There are many others, such as: nursing home ministries, neighborhood Bible clubs, homeless chapel on wheels, and many more.

A good fisherman has more than one fishing hole. A good fisherman knows that depending on the various things, he may have to change his bait to work with the fishing hole he is in.

The same is true in our efforts to win the lost. While door-to-door, confrontational soulwinning is right and one of the best methods of reaching people for Christ, we should look for additional ways to get the Gospel out, reach and disciple the lost.

One of these methods (or hooks) is the Christmas Cantata or Musical. We use our Christmas Musical here at Parkside Baptist Church as a tool to reach the lost.

1. **WHY HAVE A CHRISTMAS MUSICAL?**
2. Of course, the number one reason to have a Christmas Musical is to reach the lost. There are some people who may never consider coming to your church or any church for that matter. But they have an understanding of Christmas and are looking for something religious that is not a “church service” so to speak that they could attend. This is a seasonal “hook” that can be used to reach the lost. Use a cantata that tells the story of someone trusting Christ as Savior. Then, after the cantata is over, your pastor can give a brief sermon (15-20 minutes) giving a clear presentation of the Gospel followed by an altar call.
3. Another reason to have a Christmas Musical is for your community. When your community sees that you are having such a service, in many ways, it seals your church’s place in the community. For some reason, it creates a sense of “normalcy” about your church in their eyes. In many ways, they expect you to do something special during the Christmas season.
4. Thirdly, having a Christmas presentation is a great way to unify your music program. Everyone coming together for a special purpose creates a togetherness amongst your choir, musicians, and church members. Our choir looks forward to this event all year long!
5. **SELECTING YOUR MUSICAL**
6. Be looking for and listening to various options of Christmas Cantatas throughout the year.
7. Watch like-minded churches and what they did for their Christmas Musicals.
8. Oftentimes, you can get ideas for your church for the future.
9. Search YouTube for presentations of like-minded churches who have done cantatas in the past.
10. Select a presentation that has the Gospel included in the story. This will add to you being able to make an appeal later in the service.
11. Check with Majesty Music or Bible Truth Music for many different cantata selections they have available. In time, you may be able to take songs from various places and write your own cantata!
12. Around May or June, make your selection and send it to Pastor for his insight and approval.
13. Determine in advance how many times your Musical will be performed. For instance, just one Sunday night? One Sunday morning and one Sunday night? One Saturday night and one Sunday night?
14. **PRACTICING YOUR MUSICAL**
15. One of the concerns of having a Christmas Musical may be, “When are we going to have time to practice and prepare? We are such a busy church!” This is a legitimate thought! Most Independent Baptist Churches are very active and their choir and musicians are not only involved in the music department but are also busy in other church ministries! Advanced planning and organization is a must in order for your Musical to go well.
16. When purchasing your music, also purchase the rehearsal tracks from the publisher if they are available. Rehearsal tracks are digital SATB recordings. Each respective part is highlighted for each section of the choir: soprano, alto, tenor, or bass. For instance, I would have four separate digital recordings of “song #1” – one highlighting the soprano part, one highlighting the alto part, and so forth. Then take those files and make a rehearsal CD of all the songs for your sopranos, another CD for your altos, and so forth. You can also send these files out via email to your choir. The advantage of using rehearsal tracks is that the choir members can practice them at home and be better prepared when it is rehearsal time.
17. Find a time on your church calendar to have multiple practices prior to the presentation. We have our rehearsals once a month, starting in August, with your final dress rehearsal in December (5 rehearsals). Our rehearsals typically last 2 hours. If you have multiple pianists – perhaps you can break into four different rehearsals for the first hour (SATB), and reconvene as a complete choir to go over everyone’s parts combined. If you do not have multiple pianists, perhaps each section could break away and practice with their rehearsal tracks. This way there is no wasted time while one section waits for the other section to learn their parts.
18. Prior to each rehearsal, know what you need to accomplish during that rehearsal. For instance, if your choir has to learn eight songs, make it your goal for your choir to learn two songs each rehearsal.
19. If possible, look for a few songs in the Musical that you could assign out to other singing groups instead of the choir. The more people you get involved in the Musical, the more families you are going to have excited about the musical, the more people they will invite! Perhaps use a Children’s Choir, a soloist, or a special singing group or two.
20. Try to enlist people who are not in your choir to play the acting roles. Again, the goal is to get more people involved!
21. If you have someone who can assist you, you can assign them to be over the acting while you are over the “musical” part of the Musical. Doing this will allow them to practice (in a different room) at the same time each month as your choir and musicians are practicing.
22. Purchase a CD or two of the entire production from the publisher and give these CDs to the actors. This helps them understand how their character is to sound, come across, etc.
23. Require the actors to memorize their lines. The play will seem more natural this way. If possible, have someone (perhaps the person who is over the acting) to sit on the front row to be available to whisper a line if someone gets stuck. Another option is to have the actors’ lines on a screen in an inconspicuous location for them to glance at if needed.
24. If you have an orchestra, it would also be a good thing for them to practice the same times that the choir is practicing. For us, the orchestra practices for the first hour on their own, then reconvenes with the choir when we resume a unified practice for the second hour.
25. Dress rehearsal! Have a final dress rehearsal the day or week prior to the actual presentation of your Christmas Musical. While the choir would not have to be “dressed for the occasion,” you should require your actors to be. Require all hands on deck – choir members, group members, actors, sound men, lighting crew, etc. This rehearsal may take a bit more than two hours, but try to keep it inside the two hours so as not to be laborious. Have a brief prayer meeting at the close of the final rehearsal asking God to work through the singers, musicians, actors, and Pastor.
26. **ADVERTISING YOUR MUSICAL**
27. Gospel Tracts – Create a two-sided tract advertising your Christmas Musical. On one side, have a nice graphic along with all of the details for your event. On the other side, have a clear, Gospel presentation that you would normally have on a Gospel tract. As the music director, I oversee the graphic design for our Musical and we use that design for the once side of our “invitation.” We typically start passing these out the first week of November. We use them in various ways in addition to using them for door-to-door soulwinning – we place them on community bulletin boards, leave them in waiting rooms, and much more. We place a table in the lobby for all church members to have access to pick up these tract / invitations to help us in getting these out to the community, family, and friends. If we have any extra of these invitation / tracts available the week before, we have often asked for volunteers, loaded up a bus, and blitzed a local neighborhood until they were all passed out.
28. Social Media – Using the same graphic design that was on the invitation / tracts, the church will periodically post something about the event on their social media platforms. If you or your church uses Facebook, you can actually create an “event” with all of the details. People can actually indicate their interest level. If they select “going,” Facebook will remind them of the event as it draws near. Then encourage those involved in the Musical to share the church social media posts and invite others on their social media platforms as well. Free advertisement!
29. Neighborhood Apps – Many neighborhoods have apps where they notify those in the community of different things. Community events are often found here. Take the opportunity to post about the Musical on these apps! Free advertisement!
30. Word of Mouth – One of the best advertisements for anything is word of mouth! For this type of advertisement to work, people must open their mouths and invite people! Invite family, coworkers, friends, etc. You may find that more people would be willing to attend a free Christmas event than even a church service.
31. **PERFORMING YOUR MUSICAL**
32. While you could require everyone in your choir to dress in a matching uniform, requesting your choir to dress in a certain color scheme requires less of a financial burden upon those participating. We have used colors like black and gold, red and black, dark blue and turquoise, etc. Both of these options look very sharp when your choir is ready to perform.
33. Have your platform decorated for Christmas. You may even want to build a set for the acting portion of your Musical, just be sure not to let it block the congregation’s view of the choir.
34. Have greeter’s welcoming guests and members alike in your lobby and in your auditorium. Christmas is naturally a warm and friendly time. Use this to your advantage as you know the ultimate goal – presenting the Gospel!
35. Begin your service with a Christmas hymn followed by a brief welcome by the Pastor and / or Music Director. By all means, have the ushers pass out / collect visitor’s cards! Then go directly into the performance.
36. After the performance, the Pastor can give a Gospel appeal and draw the net.
37. Finish the service with a “thank you” from the Music Director and the Pastor, followed by a closing Christmas hymn.
38. During the closing hymn, have your actors (still in their outfit) awaiting in the lobby to thank people for coming as they leave the service.
39. **AFTER THE PERFORMANCE**
40. After the final performance, have a time (perhaps at the end of the service) where all those involved can come together for a fellowship with a light meal. The choir could all pitch in and bring certain items potluck or you could have a sign-up list if you are trying to accomplish a certain type of meal. This fellowship allows for participants to tell how God used the Musical either in their lives or in the lives of others, which in turn, helps the Musical participants see how God worked through them!
41. A day or two after the performance, make notes of things you personally like or would like to improve upon for the next year. Do this while it is fresh on your heart. Save those notes to be implemented on your next year’s performance!
42. Give God all the glory for He does!