

## Awesome Autumn Activities

As cooler air arrives and leaves begin turning shades of yellow, red and orange, it's time to think about some "Awesome Autumn" activities that you can share with the children of your church. Here are a few ideas:

Visit a pumpkin patch and go Pumpkin Picking. Check with the farm to see if they offer a hayride or other activities like a Corn Maze. Bring along some cookies, juice and blankets to share a picnic snack. Let each child choose a pumpkin that can be decorated on "Pumpkin Sunday" (see below) the following week. Mark their name on the bottom of the pumpkin they choose with a permanent marker for easy identification later. Take plenty of chaperones with you and remember most farms give a discount to church groups. Check with your local county agriculture office for a list of pumpkin patches in your area or look online under "agritourism" for your county. One of my favorite places to go for a field trip is Hill Ridge Farms in Youngsville, N.C.. It's a short drive from Raleigh and they have hayrides, train rides, gem mining, a giant slide, farm animals and much more plus, of course, pumpkin picking. It can get expensive so budget accordingly. Visit their website at [www.hillridgefarms.com](http://www.hillridgefarms.com). There are plenty of "mom and pop" farms around that offer a budget friendly visit to the pumpkin patch if you want to keep it simple.

For "Pumpkin Sunday," cover tables with newspaper and let the kids decorate their pumpkins with paint and stickers or use carving kits (available at Walmart, Walgreens, Target, etc.). The carving kits include a scooper for removing the insides of the pumpkin. Adult supervision is required when using the carving tools. Provide tea light candles for each pumpkin or go with the safer alternative: battery operated tea lights. Both can be purchased from the Dollar Tree in bulk. If you carve your pumpkins, save the pumpkin seeds and toast them for a snack later (see recipe below).

Save a few smaller pumpkins to use in a "Pumpkin Roll" (think White House Easter egg roll) or set up a game of "Pumpkin Bowling." You can use 2 liter plastic soda bottles filled with a little sand as the bowling pins. The pumpkins probably won't last long with either of these games but the kids will have lots of fun!

If you don't carve your pumpkins into jack-o-lanterns, consider making a Centerpiece out of them. Cut off the top, hollow out the center, place a plastic cup snugly in the area hollowed out then add oasis floral foam to the cup. You can purchase greenery, berries and other items for your centerpiece at a craft store or use what you find around the church. Ask the kids to bring in clippings from their yard. Be creative! You will be amazed at the results. Give the finished centerpieces to your Children's Ministry volunteers as a thank you or use them to decorate the tables in your Fellowship Hall.

Now here's the recipe for those tasty pumpkin seeds:

### Roasted Pumpkin Seeds Recipe

1 cup of raw pumpkin seeds, rinsed and dried  
6 tablespoons white sugar  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon pumpkin pie spice (or cinnamon)  
1 tablespoon vegetable oil

Directions:

Preheat oven to 250 degrees F. Spread pumpkin seeds in a single layer on a lightly greased baking sheet. Toast for 45 minutes, stirring occasionally, until dry and toasted. Larger seeds may take longer.

In a large bowl, stir together 2 tbs. white sugar, the salt and pumpkin pie spice (or cinnamon). Set aside. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the pumpkin seeds and sprinkle the remaining sugar over them. Stir with a wooden spoon until the sugar melts, about 45 seconds. Pour seeds into the bowl with the spiced sugar and stir until coated. Allow to cool before serving.

### Here are a few other fun fall ideas that don't include pumpkins:

Visit an apple orchard and go **Apple Picking**. Bring along baskets and have "teams" pick apples together. Afterwards, talk about how "many hands make light work." Cut open apples to show how some apples may look great on the outside but are rotten on the inside. Talk about how we are "known by our fruit." Take the apples back to the church to have "**Apple Sunday**" the following week.

For "**Apple Sunday**," use some of the apples you picked at the orchard as a snack. For a special treat, add a stick to each apple and let the kids cover the apples in frosting then roll them in sprinkles. If you have an apple press, make apple cider. Cut some apples in half and use red, yellow and green paint to make a stencil. Stamp the stencil onto a precut tree background you have prepared and display in the hallway to remind the kids of your trip to the apple orchard.

Take a **Nature Walk** at a local park or just around the church. Give each child a brown paper bag or ziplock bag to collect leaves, acorns or other nature items they find. Use those items collected to make a **Leaf Placemat**, **Leaf Rubbings**, or maybe an **Acorn Necklace**.

**Plant Mums** around the church and/or parsonage with the help from the ladies of the church.

**Rake Leaves** at the church or parsonage. This is great exercise for the kids and will help them learn about keeping the church grounds tidy. You might want to let them pile up some leaves and play in them FIRST!

**Make a Scarecrow**: Gather old clothing (a pair of jeans or overalls and a flannel shirt) and stuff them to make the body of your scarecrow. You can use leaves, hay or newspaper for stuffing. For the head, use a plastic jack-o-lantern or a real one then finish off with a straw hat and bandana. Add a cardboard sign that says "God is good!", "Jesus loves me!" or the scripture of your choice.

**Corn Shucking**: Visit a local farm, farmer's market or the grocery to get corn that still has husks. Make sure you shuck the corn outside...it will be messy! Send a few ears of corn home with each child to share with their family for dinner. Save the husks for crafts you can make including corn husk dolls.

**"Trunk or Treat"**: This year consider planning "Trunk or Treat" as a Halloween-alternative outreach event. Trunk-or-Treat combines the fun of trick or treating with the safety of having the event at your church. And it's a great way to involve your entire congregation in your children's ministry.

I like to present Trunk-or-Treat as a celebration of Fall's harvest. When our church decorates for trunk-or-treat you won't see any ghosts, goblins, witches or ghouls. No bats, vampires or monsters. What you will see instead is lots of pumpkins, gourds, apples, corn stalks and mums. Nothing scary is allowed. That goes for costumes as well for both children and adults.

We usually have our Trunk-or-Treat on the Sunday evening closest to Halloween since we are presenting it as a Halloween alternative. We only offer it to the children of our church but if you want to offer it as an outreach ministry to the community, schedule your event for Halloween night.

Trunk-or-Treat works best when it's set up in two parts: game booths and trunks. If you plan a two hour event, schedule game booths for the kids inside your building during the first half then trunks outside in the parking lot for the second half. Consider a costume parade in between to transition the kids from game booths to trunks.

If you have an active youth group, ask them to run your game booths. Some suggestions for booths include: go fish, bobbing for apples, pumpkin bowling, cookie decorating, duck pond and ring toss. Sand art, hair spray painting and pumpkin carving can also be offered but will require adult supervision. If your space and budget allows, you might want to offer a dunking booth, jumping house or hayride, too.

You can hand out small Christian themed prizes at each booth. I like to purchase mine from [www.orientaltrading.com](http://www.orientaltrading.com). If you order them early enough, you can get free shipping and other discounts.

Now let's talk about the trunks. Each trunk needs a theme. Encourage your trunk volunteers to use a Bible story or character in decorating their trunk. If they can't think of a Bible story theme, ask them to be creative but remember to keep the theme Christ centered. Make sure each trunk has a scripture printed on poster board that the kids can repeat to receive their candy. The poster board scriptures can be used over again for Trunk-or-Treat next year so be sure to store them safely after the event. The same goes for your game booth supplies.

Ask each trunk to provide their own candy. Make sure it is individually wrapped and avoid home baked goods if possible. Always over-estimate the amount of candy needed. It's better to

have too much than too little.

You might want to have a trunk contest and offer a prize to the best themed trunk. I never cease to be amazed at some of the trunks that show up each year. Amazed in a good way. We have had trunks with fishing themes ("Fishers of Men"), ocean themes ("Jonah and the Whale"). Sheep themes ("The Good Shepherd") and animals ("Noah's Ark"). One year we had a lady with a red VW bug who put big black stick-on-dots all over her car and dressed herself like a ladybug. THAT was creative! So you can see that Trunk-or-Treat can be a fun event for kids of all ages!

Serving Christ joyfully,  
Mamie Alley