

have a lego christmas | christmas resources

NEIL ATWOOD shares some Christmas resources ...

There's no question that Christmas time holds great opportunity for gospel ministry to the communities that we live in – it's just a shame that it has to happen at, well, Christmas time – when our energies are probably not at their peak after a busy year.

So, that's why it's a great idea to rip off other people's ideas at Christmas time and save some energy so you can look happy and upbeat at church on Christmas morning!

Here's two ideas that we used at our church here in Sydney over the last couple of years:

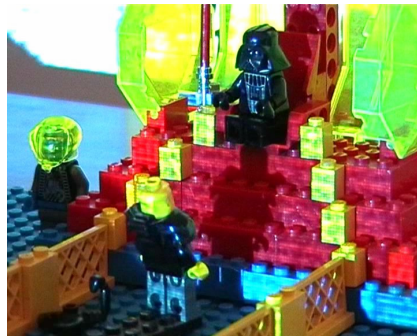
Background ...

Our church is in the heart of Sydney's western suburbs. Once pure working class, it is rapidly becoming almost trendy. Our church property is a corner block at a fairly busy intersection, and so has good exposure to the local population as they make their way to and from home. We have a history of holding a Christmas Carols event in the car park and grassed area at the front of the block. This has meant that people can drift in and out as they feel comfortable, and don't have to deal with the issue of actually coming into our church building.

We learned some years ago that a simple talk at this event just didn't work. Non-church people at the

event would just switch off and chat with each other.

So each year we attempt to come up with an attention-grabbing concept that will do justice to the gospel opportunity, while also being entertaining for a wide range of ages. Sometimes we hit the mark, sometimes not. Here's a couple that did seem to work pretty well.



A Lego Christmas – Christmas 2002

'Sunday Night Church' at Toongabbie Anglican has something of a history of using video material creatively, but this remains something of a high in creative thinking, if not in technical sophistication!

The premise was to tell the Christmas 'story' in three episodes

to be shown on a large rear-projection screen during the carols event. The twists were that the biblical story was blended with a dash of Star Wars (picture Darth Vader as Herod), and 'acted' totally in Lego! The first year this was used was when one of the recent 'prequel' episodes of the Stars Wars movies was released.

The result was a humorous, punchy gospel-focussed tool that appealed to a wide variety of ages.

The lack of technical sophistication was a deliberate strategy. We had no chance of competing with the sophisticated technology of the commercial world, so we made a 'feature' of it's simplicity. This can be a useful tool for churches to use every now and then. It allows us to poke a bit of fun at ourselves and to be seen as self-deprecating by outsiders. It worked a treat on this situation.

The script was carefully written to use the technique of communicating at multiple levels. So we had lines and jokes for the kids and others for the adults. Again, this seemed to work well.

It's worth noting that we went beyond the Christmas story, and included Jesus death and resurrection as well. This was tricky, and was the part that took most thought and rewriting, but it did make sense given the storyline (Jesus being the one to save the

world from the evil 'empire')

The comments we had from church members who had bought along non-Christian friends and family were overwhelmingly positive. A few didn't 'get' it, but the majority certainly did, and for what's it's worth, we noticed increased numbers in church on Christmas day.

Footnote: One aspect of this kind of production that can trip you up is copyright. Because we used clips of Stars Wars music (amongst other commercially available music), we should have obtained a copyright license from APRA. (<http://www.apra.com.au>) It was a significant oversight that we didn't think of until later. The cost is not huge, but it does need to be accounted for in preparing and budgeting for project like this.

What do you want for Christmas? – Christmas 2003

Christmas 2003 was a little less 'out there'. We went with a program pitched fully at young children. With some church members talented in puppetry and scriptwriting, we produced the entire program for the carols event for puppets.



Spok and Jerome (pictured above) MC'd the whole night (with a small

amount of assistance from a human or two), and weaved the gospel into a simple, but effective kids story.

Carols were added in short brackets, and often the lyrics connected well with where we were in the story. A couple of soloist items were also included in the program.

One of the freedoms that puppets give you is that they can say and do things that their human operators could never get away with! So Spok and Jerome were able to adlib and interact with the crowd in some fresh and entertaining ways.

One feature worked particularly well. We produced the story that the script told (in a much fuller form), along with colouring pictures, Christmas puzzles and recipes in a large format children's book, complete with a full colour cover, and all our church details on the back.

We put these in carry bags with a small pack of colouring pencils, and some other small Christmas goodies. At the end of the night we gave 300 of these 'showbags' away. So even if the kids were distracted during the night, they would be able to revisit the story later.

In retrospect, the script didn't have quite enough 'punch' to sustain the 70-80 minute program – but at least families went away with the story in the colouring book to read to their kids over the holidays.

Copies of most of the resources we created for this are available on the Perspective web site.

Christmas 2004?

We don't know what we will end up doing this year yet. At the time of writing we were just starting serious work on Carols 2004. One change is likely: A move off-site to a nearby high school where we have made significant inroads this year with the gospel.

This will mean some big changes as we pitch it to a different demographic (high school kids and their families – including younger siblings). One idea we are toying with is a combined live action/video presentation involving some of the high school kids, along the lines of 'Survivor – Christmas Day'.

We'll see how it pans out, but we will be putting lots of energy into the unique, once-a-year gospel opportunity that Christmas is, and praying God uses it to His glory.

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Go to <http://www.toongabbieanglican.org/christmas/> to see what they're doing this year