

Hallowe'en: Guidance for Diocese of Chichester schools

Context

Activities around Halloween have become more prominent in recent years, both because of the importing of American culture into Britain and a rise in New Age movements.

The diocese often receives questions from church schools about Hallowe'en.

Whilst activities outside school are the responsibility of parents, the diocese believes it is not appropriate for church schools to celebrate this festival.

The History of Hallowe'en

It is often seen as 'harmless fun', but Halloween originated with the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced sow-in) and linked to the Celtic New Year on 1st November. Samhain marked the end of the summer and harvest, and the beginning of the cold dark winter, and a time associated with human death. This is still celebrated by pagans and those whose beliefs are based in the occult today, such as druids.

Celts and pagans believe/d that on All Hallow's Eve the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead become blurred. They believe that the spirits of those who have died return to walk the earth. Historically, there have been many practices associated with this day including making sacrifices on huge bonfires to Celtic deities.

These are the historical roots but current practices associated with Halloween are not always harmless. Christian tradition is clear that spiritual forces are very real and we should take them seriously. There are many examples in the Bible of people being tormented by evil spirits and how they are set free from this. Hallowe'en has links with the least acceptable elements of New Age activities – occultism, witchcraft and Satanism.

Within British folklore witches and demons represent moral evil. By encouraging pupils to dress up as witches and write their own spells and charms, we could easily cause confusion for children about the difference between good and bad and right and wrong.

Our advice would be to explain in a relevant way to pupils and parents why the festival is not marked in your school.

It is also possible to offer positive alternatives which could include:

- A Light Party to mark All Saints Day when we remember people who lived for God and so brought his light to the world.
- Celebrating the victory of goodness and love over all that is evil – to put an element of transformation into the activities for children. Rather than have 'spooky' costumes, especially that might cost money, why not dress as super heroes, offer face painting at school or the chance to design a mask that shows how goodness triumphs over evil.

- A 'pilgrimage' in the dark, adding layers of costume or decoration to transform the children as they return home.
- Changing trick-or-treating to gift-giving: subvert the trick-or-treating element of Halloween by getting rid of the 'trick' element and giving gifts instead of just expecting to receive them. Children could visit other classes with small gifts eg bookmarks they have made.

Keep the aspects which make it attractive to children, but place these in a positive framework of a Light Party to celebrate good conquering evil.

Resources and ideas to support schools

Games with the themes of light and darkness can be found at <http://www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/halloween-light-and-dark/>

This leaflet looks at Jesus as light of the world and addresses being afraid of the dark.

<http://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/a-friend-in-the-dark>

<http://www.eauk.org/church/resources/halloween-resources.cfm>

<https://www.cpo.org.uk/catalogue.aspx?cat=5025>

Scripture Union has suggestions on how to run a Light Party.

<https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/what-we-do/new-initiatives/light-parties-2017>

The Carve a Heart Campaign from World Vision offers a chance to carve a heart into a pumpkin and donate to help children living in fear – of hunger and poverty and to transform their lives.

<http://www.worldvision.org.uk/get-involved/carve-heart/>

References

Diocese of Lichfield, Policy Statement on New Age Thinking for Church of England Schools: <http://www.ldbe.co.uk/policy-statement-for-new-age-thinking/>

Richards, A. Halloween Version: 02 Church of England: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/New%20Religious%20Movements%20-%20Halloween.pdf>

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