

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Guide to hosting a B.L.E.S.S. Christmas party



PARTIES? WHY NOW?

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Dear friends,

What a year it has been. During this extended COVID-19 pandemic, many are feeling more isolated than ever before and long for connection. Thus while we do the necessary to protect ourselves and our families from the virus, let's host small-scale parties/gatherings to B.L.E.S.S. our non-Christian friends and family members. Why? Because we need to make the most of every opportunity and redeem the time (Eph 5:16) by sharing God's love. We can be used by God to refresh someone this Christmas (1 Sam 16:23). May God give us many life-giving spiritual conversations as we mingle and makan.

Grace and peace in Christ,
Benjamin Sun, Head of Outreach, Covenant EFC

PARTY PLANNING: THE BASICS

Date, Time and Venue

First, pick a **date** that fits the schedule of your guests. Do it in **Dec 2021** to catch the Christmas vibe!

Select a suitable **time**. Avoid ending the party too late if there's work the next day.

Next, choose a good **venue**. You can have the B.L.E.S.S. party anywhere that obeys COVID-related rules - at home, a restaurant, or even have a picnic outdoors!

The key is to choose a location that would allow your guests to feel relaxed and have meaningful conversations.

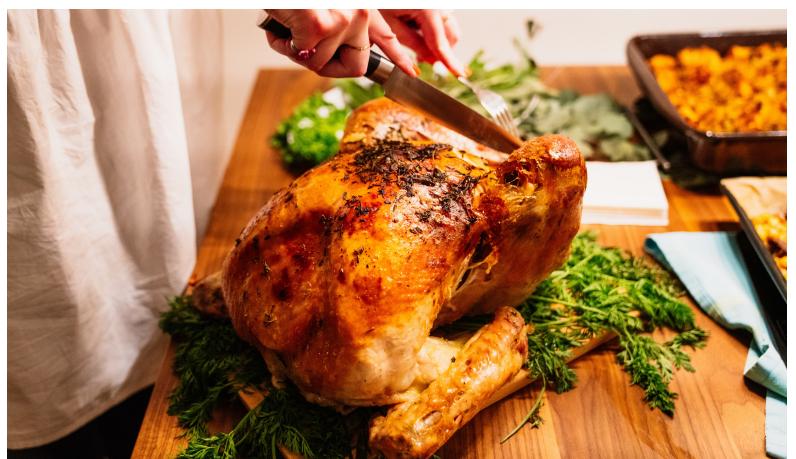


Guests and Invitations

The "B" in B.L.E.S.S. is *begin in prayer*. Ask the Lord for people to invite. Ask for His blessing upon the party. Remember - it's not by might or power but by the Spirit that the gospel advances!

As you plan the guest list, be mindful of the current restrictions on the size of gatherings due to COVID-19. Thus, we encourage small groups of from each CG to host the parties. Alternatively, individual families can host.

Send invitations in advance to book your guests' schedules early. Tell them what they need to know about the party (date/time, directions, and other instructions e.g. gifts to bring if you are playing the gift exchange game (see pg. 3). Get them EXCITED!



Food and Drink and Ambience

If you are hosting at home, have fun planning a festive menu, or whatever your guests prefer (Japanese Christmas dinner, anyone?). Retailers will be selling Christmas delicacies so book early if you want them :)

Providing nibbles and drinks is helpful, because food fuels conversation!

Another thing that creates a welcoming atmosphere is ambient music. Spotify and YouTube are great for Christmas-related playlists.

As you do these, don't be stressed! Enjoy it. It's not the *lavish spread* that will touch our guests, but God's *lavish love* that is shown when we spend time with them. The fellowship matters more than food.

We serve not to impress, but to B.L.E.S.S.!

PARTY PROGRAMME AND ACTIVITIES

A simple party programme

- **Welcoming guests.** Be ready to receive guests about 15 min before the start time, with drinks and finger food. If your guests don't know each other, introductions or ice-breaker games may be good.
- **Grace.** Tell your guests that you will give thanks for the meal. This simple prayer will point to God!
- **Food and conversation.** Spiritual conversations may happen at the dinner table. Don't be anxious to drive the conversation to "serious" topics!
- **Post-meal activities.** You may want to enjoy carol singing, or play games (see pages 4-5). Carols are a great way to proclaim the story of Christmas.
- **Gift exchange.** This allows your guests to contribute to the party by preparing a gift. It also enables us to bless our guests with thoughtful gifts (more ideas on a gift exchange on this page!)
- **Share what Christmas means to you.** As the host, you have the privilege of sharing with your guests why you are having a Christmas party. This is an opportunity to briefly share the gospel, or your testimony (see page 7 for tips on how to do this).
- **Farewell.** Say a prayer of blessing for your guests before they leave, if they are comfortable. Invite them to church services / Alpha if they are spiritually seeking!

Gift Exchange

Quiet version

Label all the gifts that have been brought with a number. Prepare numbered paper slips (e.g.. 5 slips for 5 gifts). During the game, each guest reaches into a bowl with the paper slips in it and picks a slip. Take the gift which matches the number on the slip.

Not-so quiet version (better for larger groups)

Prepare numbered slips of paper according to the number of guests (e.g. slips of paper numbered 1-8 for 8 participants). The person with slip #1 will go first and pick a gift from the pile. Next, the person with slip #2 can pick a gift from the pile OR snatch a gift from person #1. If he/she snatches, person #1 can pick a fresh gift from the pile. The person with slip #3 goes next, and can either take from the pile or snatch from person #2 or #3. The game continues in this way until everyone has a present.

Gift value/price

Warning: **gift-giving can be a sensitive issue.** You may wish to set a maximum price on gifts to ensure that people do not feel pressured to spend too much.

Alternatively, you may choose to set a minimum price to encourage guests to give gifts that are of a higher quality. It all depends on who is coming to the party!

In either case, a gift exchange is fun and rings in the Christmas cheer!



CAROLS

We wish you a merry Christmas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-OF7KGyDis>

We wish you a merry Christmas (x3)
And a happy New Year

[Refrain]

Good tidings we bring to you and your kin
We wish you a merry Christmas
and a happy New Year

Now bring us some figgy pudding (x3)
Now bring some out here

I'll be home for Christmas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yhI35F2NBO>

I'll be home for Christmas
You can count on me
Please have snow and mistletoe
And presents on the tree
Christmas Eve will find me
Where the love light gleams
I'll be home for Christmas
If only in my dreams

Silent Night

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=093_hkkbK38

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin Mother and Child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace (x2)

Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!
Christ the Savior is born! (x2)

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth (x2)

Angels we have heard on high

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OK17zGHFrKU>

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.

Refrain:

Gloria in excelsis Deo! (x2)

Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
Which inspire your heav'nly song?

Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

O Holy Night

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FptWuI_ct5M

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn
Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night, O night divine

Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming
With glowing hearts by his cradle we stand
So, led by light of a star sweetly gleaming
Here come the wise men from Orient land
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger
In all our trials born to be our friend
He knows our need,
To our weakness He's no stranger!
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend! (x2)

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is Love and His gospel is Peace;
Chains shall he break,
for the slave is our brother,
And in his name all oppression shall cease,
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we;
Let all within us praise his holy name.
Christ is the Lord! O praise his name forever!
His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim! (x2)

GAMES

Ice-breaker games

Two Truths and a Lie. This game works better when guests are unfamiliar with each other. All guests take turns to share two truths about themselves, and one lie. After the sharing, everyone in the group guesses which statement was untrue. The truths/lies can be about any topic: your childhood/family, your food preferences, and your past experiences/accomplishments.

Christmas-related games / activities

Christmas Charades. Divide guests into two groups, and take turns to act out objects, people or activities related to Christmas. If your guests are non-Christians who are unfamiliar with Christmas, you may want to broaden the category to "festivals" or "celebrations".

Christmas Photobooth. If you can allocate a small space in the home for a photobooth with props e.g. santa hats and reindeer ears, your guests can take photos and take home a nice keepsake!

Christmas Kahoot. You can create your own Kahoot game for free at kahoot.com. How about designing a Kahoot based on Christmas fun facts (google for these), such as:

- The tradition of Christmas trees began when Prince Albert of Germany bought a tree for his new wife, Queen Victoria of England
- The Christmas wreath was originally a symbol of Christ! The holly represented the crown of thorns that Jesus bore on Calvary.
- Santa Claus actually has a Canadian postal code so you can write to him if you really want



Do you want to draw a snowman? Take turns drawing a snowman, but with one twist: draw the snowman on paper plates placed on top of your head! A small prize can be awarded for the drawing that looks most like a snowman. Guaranteed to draw laughs!



Board / Card Games

You may want to invite your guests to join you in playing any wholesome board / card games that you may own. A wonderful way to enjoy fellowship together!



HOW TO HAVE SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

Err ... me? I don't like talking publicly about God stuff ...

A recent survey done by the Barna Group, shows that most Christians in the U.S.A. talked about their faith less than once a month. Here are some of the reasons why:

- Religious conversations seem to create tension or arguments (28%)
- People felt they didn't know enough to talk about their faith (17%)
- People have been hurt by religious conversations in the past (4%)

Maybe some of us are wary about starting a spiritual conversation with our F.R.A.N.S. (friends, relatives, associates, neighbours, strangers). Perhaps it is because we don't want to offend others.

Or perhaps it's because we don't want to appear as Christian 'salesmen'. We don't want to have cheesy conversations where we are just waiting to push a gospel presentation on our conversation partner.

If you feel that way, **the good news is that spiritual conversations don't have to be like that at all.**

What are spiritual conversations?

Spiritual conversations may not necessarily involve heavy-duty Christian apologetics. Instead, spiritual conversations can start very naturally, as we take a genuine interest in other people's lives.

For instance, in these challenging times many are anxious about their jobs or relationships in their family. We can sensitively ask our F.R.A.N.S. to share their struggles, and offer a listening ear.

The honest sharing of experiences and emotions can help deep spiritual conversations to bloom!



Tips for spiritual conversations

Listen. It is key for us to listen attentively and empathetically as our F.R.A.N.S take the risk to open up their hearts to us. Listen not just for *information*, but for underlying *emotions* and *values*. Empathise with the painful experiences of others. Don't be too quick to offer solutions. Don't be too quick to rebut points of view that we disagree with.

Ask questions. Ask, because we are genuinely interested in what our F.R.A.N.S. have to say (e.g. "That's fascinating! Can you tell me more?") Don't be an interrogator. When we ask with a posture of love, we will take the conversation deeper.

Pray. Pray silently during the conversation, asking the Holy Spirit for wisdom. The Holy Spirit may lead you to say something that the person needs to hear. If someone has shared a struggle, offer to pray for the person. Most people are open to being prayed for!

Share your story. You could consider sharing a personal experience of your own that relates to what the person has shared, and how God has been real in your own life. If there's an opportunity, briefly share how you came to Christ.

Share the Gospel story. Our F.R.A.N.S. may well ask us what the Christian faith means to us. Be ready to share the gospel story with them.

Simple presentations like the Three Circles or Evangecube may help you get the message across clearly. Or we can use aids such as the GodTools app!

HOW TO SHARE THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

As the host of the Christmas party/gathering, you have the privilege of sharing with your guests why Christmas is worth celebrating. Through your hospitality, you would have "earned" the right to speak. This is a perfect opportunity to briefly share the gospel and the message of Christmas.

Don't be stressed about delivering a sermonette to your guests. A simple, heartfelt 5-minute sharing is more than good enough! You never know how God will use the seed that you plant.

What should I actually say?

Think of your sharing like a simple burger (bread - meat - bread).

Introduction (bread). Start your sharing by making connections with some of the activities during the party. For instance, if you sang carols, you may want to mention the lyrics.

Share the gospel / your testimony (meat). The good news of the Gospel is that God gave us the gift of His Son that first Christmas, and that we can all receive God's gift. Present the gospel, or your personal testimony explaining why the Gospel matters to you.

Conclusion (bread). End by telling your guests what they can do if they are open to what you have shared. You may ask them if they are open to trusting in Jesus, or finding out more about Christianity through Alpha or CEFC's worship services.



This is by no means a 'model' script, but we Singaporeans love models and templates! :)

Thank you all for coming to this party tonight. It means a lot that you are here, and that we get to spend time together, just catching up.

The first song we sang tonight goes: it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Now that's worth reflecting on - what does Christmas look like to each one of us?

When we think of Christmas many of the pictures that come to mind are from the West. Candy Canes and Silver Lanes. White snow. Very foreign to us in Singapore.

But my friends, the first Christmas didn't happen in the West. It took place in the middle East. A heavily pregnant young Jewish woman and her husband were forced to have their first child in terrible circumstances. There was no hospital. They could not even find a clean room for the birth. Those of us who are parents would never want to be in their situation.

But from this horrid situation came hope for the world, hope for you and I. Why? The Bible tells us that this was no ordinary baby, but the Son of God, Jesus, who was sent to save us. Save us from what? He came to save us from the darkness and evil in our own lives. God sent his Son Jesus, not to remain a cute baby forever, but to grow up and finish a deadly mission. His mission was to suffer a criminal's death on a rough wooden cross. Jesus died on our behalf, and took all our evil upon himself, because the punishment for our wrongdoing is death.

Jesus paid the ultimate price to give us a wonderful gift this Christmas – the gift of hope. What are you hoping for this Christmas? Or are you feeling hopeless and fearful right now? If so, I believe God wants you to know that He can give you hope tonight. Right now. When Jesus died for us, He removed the separation between us and God. God wants to be close to us through life's challenges and pains, because He loves us. That's where true hope comes from.

Let's speak more after this if you would like to find out more about what I've shared. Once again, I've been so blessed by the company we've had together tonight!

PARTY'S DONE AND MY GUEST IS SPIRITUALLY HUNGRY. WHAT DO I DO?

If your guest is hungry to know more about Christ, continue to engage him/her in spiritual conversations. You may also wish to invite him/her to Alpha (alpha@cefc.org.sg), which is an excellent platform for him/her to learn more about Christianity in a non-threatening environment!

If a friend has decided to receive Jesus for the first time, consider following up with the person and nurture him/her in the foundations of the faith. If you need help with the nurture process, please contact Covenant EFC's nurturing team at (outreach@cefc.org.sg).

CAN I HOST A PARTY FOCUSED ON KIDS?

Absolutely. There are some great ideas for how to organise a really enjoyable and meaningful kids' Christmas party. Check out the "Kid's Christmas Party Guide" PDF.

THANKS BUT I JUST CAN'T HOST A PARTY!

Thank **you** for reading all the way to the end of this guide :) It's fine if you can't host a party at home!

Having a Christmas party is just one example of how we can B.L.E.S.S. The point of all this is not merely to have successful party, but to obey the **Great Commission** to make disciples of all nations, and the **Great Commandment** to love our F.R.A.N.S. as ourselves.

There are many other ways that we can B.L.E.S.S.. Feel free to get creative and come up with your own ideas. Here are five to start you off:

- **Meet to play sports or exercise!** This can always be followed by a meal, and time to catch up.
- **Have a picnic!** Spend time with friends and family outdoors in nature.
- **Enjoy a meal at a restaurant!** You can host a meal at a restaurant without the pressure of being the venue host.
- **Volunteer together!** Round up your F.R.A.N.S. to love the community this Christmas. Serving together is a fabulous way to bond meaningfully. There are volunteering opportunities offered by many VWOs. To participate in community programmes that Covenant EFC is involved in, contact Vincent Chia (vincent.chia@cefc.org.sg) for details!
- **Have an online hangout!** Many of us are likely "Zoom-bified" by now and craving face to face interaction with our F.R.A.N.S., but in some situations a physical meetup may not be possible. Connect over various e-meeting platforms. Play games and hang out together online.

CREDITS

Inspiration for party guide: <https://www.fcbc.org.sg/about/ibhfc-resources-2016>

Design: Canva.com

Photos: unsplash.com, freepik.com

Lyrics: hymnary.org, azlyrics.com

Videos: www.youtube.com

Games: shutterfly.com, pinterest.com

Spiritual conversations: outreachmagazine.com