

# Marketing has distorted Halloween

By Barbara Ann Homick  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — It's 5 p.m. The sun is starting to sink. The wind is playing with the front-yard leaves. And neighborhood children are turning into frightful creatures before their parents' eyes.

Probably one of the most exciting evenings of the year for children, Halloween is celebrated the night before All Saints Day, a holy day of obligation for Roman Catholics.

Halloween has several possible origins, some based on myth, others on superstition. According to Tom Tripiciano, an alcoholism and drug-abuse counselor for the Livingston County Council on Alcohol

and Drug Abuse, the Halloween tradition may have originated with the Druid festival Samhain.

Tripiciano, who often speaks about the occult to local groups, said the pagans believed that the sun god, Chron, went down to the world of the dead on October 31. With the sun underground, the world was covered in darkness, and evil spirits took control. Chron needed human blood to return to life, so the pagans sacrificed babies and virgins. Because of this prevalent evil, people stayed inside on this night of darkness.

The most commonly cited basis for Halloween is the notion that evil spirits roam the earth for a "last fling" on the

night before All Saints Day. Because of this belief, people supposedly began dressing like the evil spirits in order to confuse them and ensure their own safety.

Although some fundamentalists consider Halloween a pagan holiday celebrating Satan, Tripiciano said the fact that the holiday occurs on an old pagan feast day doesn't necessarily make it a negative event.

Pat Fox, director of Youth Ministry for the Rochester diocese, agreed, but said it's time to get Halloween back to its roots. Commercialization and marketing have distorted the holiday's original meaning, he said.

In the past, Fox noted, people used to dress up as their favorite saints on All Hallow's Eve. Recent marketing trends, however, encourage more sinister costumes.

As a result, some young people are confused about the desire to dress up as evil creatures. Does adopting an evil facade create a desire to delve into the dark side?

Not necessarily, said Fox. Although some youths may have an unnatural fixation with evil — which should be evident to parents and friends — most kids who favor ghoulish costumes do so to compete with their friends for the honor of being the goriest on the night of frights.

"I don't think the kids are calling the costume manufacturers and asking them to make scarier costumes or more fake blood," said the youth director. "But once it's out there, they want it."

Horror movies add to children's confusion about evil, Fox said. Such movies as *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween* glamorize the evil of serial killers, he said, adding that these movies often mix sexuality with gore, since the slashers usually go after scantily clad females.

"These movies cloud sexuality with reality, adding a sexual double meaning to violence," he remarked.

So why do young people enjoy dressing up as Freddy Krueger and Jason? Much of it is peer pressure, said Fox.

"It starts off as media pressure, and then kids aren't cool if they don't buy in to it," he said.

Tripiciano said that for Christians, Halloween is ideally a mockery of evil. Children dress up as evil beings because it's a

statement that evil has no power over the children of God, he said.

Tripiciano agreed with Fox that horror confuses children. In earlier films of the genre, good always won out over evil, he noted, whereas today's horror flicks often portray evil as indestructible through such undying characters as Freddy and Jason.

Even without the overtones of evil, Halloween marketing can give kids the wrong ideas, the two experts agreed. Riding on the yearlong popularity of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movie, TV show, action figures and games, marketers are taking full advantage of turtle-frenzy this Halloween.

"With the Turtles, we are teaching our kids that the only way to fight violence and terror is with violence and terror," Tripiciano said.

So what can parents and children do to create a healthy balance of fun and fright at Halloween?

Tripiciano suggested emphasizing the two-day holiday — Halloween night and All Saints Day. If kids realize that dressing up as monsters is a harmless way of mocking their power, they will be less inclined to dwell on the holiday's darker aspects, he said.

"We can't stop kids from experiencing things, and we can't pretend evil doesn't exist," Tripiciano observed. "But we must have a sense of caution about what myths we let our children play out."

He said it is also important for parents to stay attuned to their children's interests with evil — to distinguish between innocent curiosity and morbid fascination.

Placing an emphasis on the darkness before the dawn is the best way to achieve a healthy balance, according to Tripiciano.

"It is OK for young people to dress up if they know they are mocking — rather than celebrating — evil. In that way, Halloween can be an enriching experience for our youth," he said.



Artwork courtesy of WUHF-TV31, Rochester.

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The Catholic Courier  
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