

Ghouls, goblins and God

Is Halloween harmful to your child's spirit?

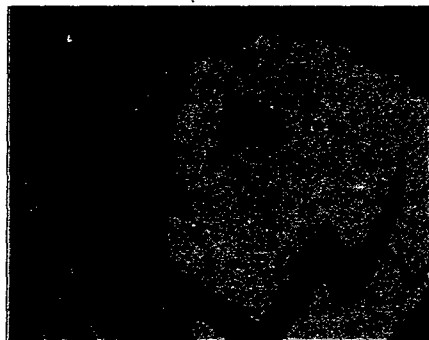
Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Every year around Oct. 31, Sherrie Maysick has to face the possibility that her children may want to don frightening dress. A member of St. Vincent DePaul Parish in Churchville, Maysick said that she would prefer her children dress up in Halloween costumes depicting people they admire, but she does allow them to dress up in mildly scary outfits.

"A nice skeleton, maybe," she added with a chuckle.

St. Francis-St. Stephen's School in Geneva became so concerned over the murderous movie-character costumes children were wearing on Halloween that it eliminated the wearing of costumes, according to Elaine S. Morrow, principal. Students can now wear "harvest colors" on Halloween, she said.

The Diocese of Rochester shares Maysick and Morrow's views that because Halloween is All Hallows' Eve, preceding All Saints' Day, children can do better things than dress up as slasher characters from movies. The diocese offers tips in the Family Traditions section of its Web site at www.dor.org/e&cfamily/ for Catholics seeking to rediscover the roots of Halloween. When you reach the Web page, click on "Holy Cow," then "Family Traditions," then "October Family Traditions." This page notes parents can consider hosting an "All Saints party" at which children wear costumes depicting priests, religious, saints and



those who perform "works of mercy," including teachers and farmers.

Meanwhile, an informal survey of parishes revealed a large number have worked with parents to put a positive spin on Halloween and tie its celebration more closely to All Saints' Day.

- On the Sunday before Halloween, St. Vincent DePaul offers catechetical lessons to its preschool children that emphasize Halloween's connection to All Saint's Day, according to Kathy Kuntz, faith-formation coordinator. Children are invited to dress in "nonviolent" costumes that represent biblical characters.

- St. Lawrence School in Greece has harvest parties in classrooms the last week in October, according to Joseph Holleran, principal. One year, each class told the story of a particular saint during an All Saints' Day liturgy, he added. This year's liturgy will focus on Mother Teresa, who will be beatified later this month. Holleran also noted that many school families forego trick-or-treating and gather in the school gymnasium on Halloween for games and a meal.

- Children at St. Felix/St. Francis Parish Cluster in Clifton Springs-Phelps participate in All Saints' chil-

Parenting

dren's Masses at both churches, according to Bonnie Resch, faith-formation coordinator. The first- and second-graders dress up as the saints whose feasts are celebrated on their birthdays. They then march in the Masses' opening processions to the tune of "When the Saints Go Marching In."

"This is one of our most-attended Masses," Resch said. "The parents love it as we connect both Halloween and All Saints' Day."

- Middle-school children at Blessed Trinity Parish at St. Margaret Mary in Apalachin go trick-or-treating for a local food bank on the Sunday before Halloween, according to Sue White, youth minister.

- Cecilia A. Ryan, religious-education coordinator and teen leader at Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Elmira noted that the parish has used jack-o'-lanterns to teach about the "light of Christ" by placing lights in pumpkins at various stages of carving. Hence, the lights go from dim to bright in the line of pumpkins.

"We asked the children to think about ... what kind of person they want to be — one who barely lets the light of Christ out or one that lets the light of Christ shine brightly so that others can give praise to God," Ryan said.

Some parents may object to any kind of Halloween celebration, Ryan said, but added: "Halloween will be celebrated anyway, so we might as well use it to catechize. If we prepare our teens and children, then they will see the day in a Christian light."

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

- **OCT. 18-19** — **Haunted barn:** The Apple Shed, 3391 Maple Ridge Rd., Newark, noon-5 p.m. \$4 ages 13 & up, \$2 ages 12 & under; also Oct. 25 & 26, 315/331-6294.


- **SUN, OCT. 19** — **Fall foliage train ride:** National Railway Historical Society, sponsor; depart from Rotterdam Rd., So.odus; travel to Newark and back, noon & 2-15 p.m.; tickets: Wegmans or That's T.H.E. Ticket outlets, 585/987-1305.

- **MON, OCT. 20** — **Registration deadline:** Oct. 22 story time for ages 4-8; "The Pumpkin Patch Parade" by Liz Curtis Higgs; story, craft activity, milk and cookies; Borromeo Prayer Center, 3011 Dewey Ave., Rochester, 6:30-7:30 p.m., \$2 per child, 585/663-5856.

- **SAT, OCT. 25** — **Ghost stories:** tales of lighthouse keepers who refused to go off duty after death; Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse Museum, behind Holy Cross Church, 4492 Lake Ave., Rochester, 7-8:30 p.m., free, limited seating, no reserves; 585/671-6205.

- **OCT. 25-26** — **Halloween party:** Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; music, crafts, trick-or-treating with storybook characters; Sat. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sun. noon-5 p.m., \$7 adults, \$6 seniors, \$5 ages 2-17; 585/263-2702.

- **MON, OCT. 27** — **Reservation deadline:** Oct. 31 Halloween party, ages 2-12; Italian American Community Center, 150 Marconi Blvd., Rochester; costume parade, hayrides, 6:30-9 p.m., \$5; 585/594-8882.



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