



Safely Un-doing the Holidays

Along with the joy of the Christmas season, dangers also surround putting up and taking down the holiday decorations. The task, if not done with safety in mind, could turn joy into sorrow. Here are several areas of concern as you pack up the decorations.

CLIMBING

Every year, several people are injured or killed putting up or taking down Christmas decorations. Many of these incidents are climbing-related. When hanging or unhooking greenery, wreaths, lights and other decorations, people tend to climb and reach.

Although it may appear inconvenient and time consuming, it is far better to take the extra time of climbing down and moving the ladder instead of reaching. Ladders, regardless of their condition can tip if not used properly.

Secondly, people often will use chairs, stools, or boxes to climb on in order to reach decorations beyond their reach. Again, a solid ladder is a much better alternative.

Finally, because of health and age, some people should not climb at all. Though they may have done it dozens of times in the past, there comes a time when people should refrain from climbing. And often they will not volunteer to stop. Therefore, church leaders should step in and make sure the person doing the climbing is the best candidate to do so. It is also important to note that children and youth should not be allowed to climb.

LADDERS

Even when a ladder is used, it is sometimes not designed for the job or in good repair. Someone should be responsible for making sure the ladders are high enough and in the working order before allowing them

to be used. Make sure the rungs are all solid and that screws are all tightened. Use of rubber or non-skid end caps can prevent the ladder from sliding. Always check ladders for load limits and compare it to the person doing the climbing. Remind climbers to never go higher than the third rung from the top.

INSPECTING DECORATIONS

Many churches will use the same decorations year in and year out as part of their tradition. One step that is often overlooked is inspecting the decorations before and after they are used. Make sure that someone is looking at the lights, trees, extension cords, and other decorations to ensure they are in good working order. If they are not, it is best to replace them. Though some may be reluctant to discard anything, often by repairing or re-using a defective item will increase the risk. Inspect, discard and replace any item that may be dangerous.

STORAGE

Many times, the decorations go in the exact same spot each year. However, fires often happen right after the holidays because the stored decorations are put on a boiler, next to a heating element or electrical outlet or wiring. Provide plenty of clearance around stored items.

Also, use extreme caution in selecting storage sites. Seldom does a church have more storage than needed. That can sometimes lead to people placing items in places they do not belong. Using unsafe attic areas, boiler rooms, next to flammables, or in stairwells can turn to a disaster rather quickly.

When going into dark storage areas, make sure there is adequate lighting and the access to it is safe.

Finally, if candles are used for services, make sure that every candle can be disposed of properly. To extinguish candles properly and safely, they should be placed in large buckets which contain water. The water will ensure the wick is completely out prior to storage. A small ember or wick that is not completely extinguished can slowly catch other flammables on fire and smolder for a long time before it catches fire or is noticed by anyone.

TEAMWORK

It is preferred that when decorations are put up or taken down that it is done with the assistance of other people. It is always safer to have a person hold a ladder, assist in carrying a box, and provide guidance while working with decorations. An extra set of eyes and hands can make the difference between a safe and hazardous condition. Also, should someone experience an injury or illness while doing the task, help can be summoned more quickly. In some instances, this could be the difference between life and death.

EXERTION

Many times older church members within the congregation have the task of putting up and taking down decorations. Overexertion is always a concern. It is wise to have a few younger church members or staff present to volunteer for the more strenuous jobs. Encourage people to take breaks, rest and enjoy the process. Look for signs of injury or illness, shortness of breath, or other medical condition. If discovered, get help immediately.

Taking safe, intentional steps to decorate or take down the holiday trimmings can save a church from having a fire or having someone injured. Appointing a specific, reliable person to be in charge and supervise the process can go a long way in reducing the risks attached to the process. Though this is a routine task that many church members have performed many times over the years, sometimes complacency can creep in and create an unsafe condition. Regardless of how many times you have done this before, have a plan, discuss it, supervise it and feel good that another memorable Christmas season came and went and will be remembered for all the right reasons

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