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BIRTHDAY PARTY  
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**CEILIDH**



## INTRO

Celebrate your Gaelic roots or just dance the night away; even the most reticent dancers find it hard to keep in their seats at a Ceilidh!

## IDEAL TARGET GROUP:

All Ages

## IDEAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE:

50 - 300 (dependent on venue size)

## AVERAGE COST:

£400 - £800 (this can be reclaimed in ticket sales/ refreshment sales)

The aims:

- Represent God's love through building an atmosphere of community and celebration.
- Christians from the church/churches involved get to meet new people who live or work locally and invite them to a high quality event.
- People from the local community are able to experience Christian community and have their perceptions of the Christian faith challenged.

## WHO

Ceilidh's are often run by schools, universities or at weddings, which shows the diversity of their appeal. They are a Scottish/ Irish tradition, but now common in England too so no matter where you are they will attract a crowd. They can work for all ages and abilities and are led so that even someone who has never danced before can learn the steps.

## WHERE?

A recent survey of churchgoing in the UK, identified that 60% of the UK are either un-churched (have pretty much never been inside one) or de-churched (have had a bad experience and don't intend to come back). For all of those people, churches can be scary places. This means that although we're hosting the party, there's good reason to host it in a neutral space. We're opting out of our church buildings as often as possible so it would be good to try and find a hall, bar or community centre to host your event. This is a great opportunity to start building relationships with local business owners as well as find a great venue for your event.

## WHEN?

This event can be run at a date that fits with your church's current rhythm of mission, taking into consideration how the event might compliment or clash with your existing church programme. Think about when is right for the people you are inviting. In order to maximise your appeal, choose a time that is not in competition with other events in the community. For this event a week night would be advisable as restaurants are less busy and more able to accommodate such an event. If many people in your community commute to work make sure you give them enough time to get back for the event.

# MAKING IT HAPPEN!

## 1. CREATE A TEAM

A group of churches together, a single church, or a small group within a church could run this event. IN order to organise it, you will then need a core team to include:

- Someone who is happy to take overall responsibility for coordinating the event
- Someone who knows how to produce high quality publicity
- Someone to organise the ceilidh band and pa.
- Someone to organise a venue and decoration.
- Someone in charge of hospitality.
- Someone who is confident enough to host the event.

A recommended core team size is therefore between 4 and 6 people although you can still have lots more people involved!

## 2. DECIDE ON YOUR COMMUNITY BOUNDARIES

Clearly define who your event is aimed at. What geographical area will you be advertising to? Is it a street? A few streets? A postcode? Ideally, do not try to reach too large a geographical area as this increases costs in publicity and makes it more difficult to build lasting relationships through the event.

## 3. PLAN YOUR FOLLOW UP

Don't leave it to last to work out how this event will fit into the wider mission of the church. You need to have a plan in place for the following scenarios.

**Scenario A:** Someone comes to the event and they are already asking questions about faith and really want to know more. How will they find out more through this event or be invited into a context where they can discover more about the gospel. For ideas download our 'Evangelistic follow up ideas' document.

**Scenario B:** Someone comes to the event without much knowledge of the Christian story and not particularly interested in finding out more. However, they love the event and are impressed that the church would put on something like this. Is there another event happening in the near future that you can invite them to?

**Scenario C:** Someone comes to the event without much knowledge of the Christian story and not particularly interested in finding out more. However, they are struck by the sense of community and would really like to hang out with people from the church more even though they are not yet interested in the Christian faith. Is there a social group (maybe a sports team, dance class, music group or film club) that meets regularly they can be invited to become a part of?

## 4. BUDGET AND FUNDRAISING

The major costs for this event will be a ceilidh band or ceilidh caller and a venue. A caller, with recorded music, is a cheaper option than a band, but a band produces a better overall atmosphere. Venue costs are highly variable.

- £250 - £500 caller/band
- £100 publicity
- £50 - £100 refreshments
- <£200 venue

Most people charge a small entry fee for a Ceilidh, so it is generally fine to do this if you cannot cover the costs. However, take into account the people you are trying to reach and whether they have the disposable income to pay for it. In certain areas even a small fee will be prohibitive. Family tickets may also be a good idea. A good price guide would be:

- £2 - £4 for adults
- £1 - £2 for children
- £5 - £8 for family tickets.

If you are struggling to find a suitable affordable venue, look for local social clubs or school halls as these will be cheaper than halls that make their money from hires.

If you charge entry you may need to pay a small amount for the music licences mentioned below. If the event is free you probably will not have to pay.

You will also need PA, which may come with the venue. If it doesn't, your church or another local church is likely to have what you need. Some Ceilidh bands may come with their own PA. If none of these options are available you can hire in PA but this will cost another £200.

#### **4.1 Raising Finance**

If your church or small group does not already have a mission fund that can help with some of the costs of this event you may have to look into some fundraising. This can be everything from cake sales and car washes, to council grants. Most local councils have small grant funds which faith groups can apply for and as your event will be benefitting local business there's a good chance of you being able to raise some funds through this. Visit your local council website for more details.

## 5. BOOK YOUR VENUE

### ***The right location***

Look for somewhere close to the heart of the community you are trying to connect with, somewhere that is generally quite popular, has an atmosphere you can work with, and can be arranged in such a way as to have a good sized dance floor without trip hazards and a space for the band to play from. A minimum dance floor size is about 6m x 6m. Ideally the dance floor would not be carpeted. As this could be quite a large event also think about how many toilets there are and how much parking is available.

### ***Meet the Manager***

Arrange to meet the manager for a face to face meeting where you can chat through your vision for the event and how it would work logistically. Remember that this is about building relationships so take the time to get to know the manager if you can and let them know that you want to support his business and not just use his space.

Things to discuss with the venue manager:

- Explain who you are and what you are hoping to do.
- Propose the idea of a Ceilidh event and tell them how it would benefit them and your local community.
- Confirm an available time and date, including set up (2 hours) and set down (1 hour) time.
- How much would it cost to hire or how many people would they expect to attend to cover bar costs?
- Are they happy for you to charge for tickets?
- Are they happy for you to rearrange the space as required?
- Are you allowed to put up banners and bunting?
- Would they be willing to have posters and flyers up advertising the event in the two weeks leading up to the event?
- Are there neighbours who are likely to complain about noise?
- Is there a maximum number of people allowed in the building?

### ***Get it in Writing***

When you have found the right place and have decided on the above details, make sure you write a follow up email to the manager with everything that has been agreed upon clearly laid out. Ask the manager to reply saying that they are happy with this. It's really important that you do this as it ensures transparency and avoids problems arising from miscommunication later in the planning of the event.

## 6. BOOK YOUR CEILIDH

The cheapest way to run a Ceilidh is to book a caller who comes with a CD to plug into your PA system. They will teach and call the dances all evening. These are often less than £250.

The other option is to hire a Ceilidh band. This is more expensive but provides a much better atmosphere for the event. Costs for a band depends on number of band members.

Ceilidh callers and bands are fairly easy to find by doing a Google search of bands in your local area. Ring a few to get a best price. Ask for a demo of their music so you can see what it sounds like beforehand. Some Ceilidh bands will bring

their own PA and lighting so make sure you ask them what they are bringing and what they expect you to provide. Some venues will ask for the PA to be pat tested and for the band to have Public liability insurance. Whether or not the venue request these things it is preferable to find a band that do as this offers you protection if anything goes wrong.

## 7. DESIGN YOUR EVENT

Think about how you are going to create an atmosphere for your event. Are you going to have a theme? If you're based in England, maybe go for a Scottish or Irish theme with food and decorations that represent the country you've chosen. Lighting should be bright enough for people to see what they're doing but also dim enough to be atmospheric. Disco lights should be avoided.

You will need some seating but should minimise the number of tables to maximise dancing space.

What are you going to do for refreshments? You will want to serve drinks at least. It is up to you whether you sell or give away refreshments. For legal reasons, only sell pre-packaged food unless the person in charge of cooking and preparing the food has a food safety certificate.

Depending on the crowd you are expecting you may want to intersperse sessions of ceilidh dancing with a DJ or with music people can just sit around and listen to. Remember that you want people to be getting to know each other and building relationships so make space for that.

Plan your timings. Give people half an hour or so to arrive before the dancing gets going. Think about how long you want the event to be and when you want to finish. Remember that you will need some set down time at the end so make sure you have the venue booked for long enough to include this. Ceilidh bands will normally play for anything up to 3 hours with a break in the middle.

## 8. LICENSING

If you're planning live music you will need a PRS (Performing Rights Society) for Music licence unless the venue is already covered. For recorded music you need a PPL licence. You may also need a Temporary Event Notice. For full details see our licensing guide. You will also need public liability insurance. For more information see our insurance guide.

## 9. PUBLICISE

### ***Flyers and posters***

For an event of this size, publicity should probably be released between 2 and 3 weeks before the event. Make sure you get the flyer designed by someone who is able to produce a professional standard of work. The quality of the flyer will indicate to the recipient the quality of the event they are attending.

Make sure the flyer clearly states the date, time, location and price of the event. Make it clear what is included in the price. If there is a website or social media platform for the event make sure this is also included on the flyer. Be sure to communicate who is running the event.

Make sure the flyer is a true representation of the content of the event. This means do not advertise the event as a ceilidh if you intend to include a 30 minute preaching slot. It is important to be honest with the public and let them know exactly what they are signing up for!

### Places to distribute flyers/posters

- Door-to-door. Get a group from the church to post them in houses in the local area. Avoid doors that say "no junk mail". Even though I'm sure you do not consider it to be "junk", it's important to respect their right to disagree!
- Ask local shops if they are willing to put a poster in their window or to keep some flyers by the till.
- Put flyers/posters up on community notice boards
- Ask local schools to give out flyers in children's book bags
- Get local churches to put the event in their news bulletin and give out flyers. Encourage church members to bring friends to the event.

## **Other publicity**

Use the internet, it offers you free publicity! If you have access to any local/church websites make sure the event is listed there. Also upload the event to any online local community calendars you can find - your council probably hosts one and there may well be others too.

Use social media, set up a Facebook group or get local tweeters tweeting about your event.

Let the local press know. Write a short press release about what you will be doing (see press release doc online). Send it to your local papers or local news websites. Within 24 hours of the event send another press release about how the event went and include pictures. This will help promote the positive work the church is doing in your community.

## **10. TICKETING**

As mentioned above you may want to sell tickets for this event. There are several ways of doing this.

Register with an online ticketing agency. There are several websites which allow you to sell tickets through their system for a small registration fee. This allows for a fully functional system with minimal admin and means that people can book tickets online. Most of them require you to register with them before you can begin selling tickets so if you wish to do this make sure you give yourselves time to get it all set up.

Have a dedicated phone line and sell tickets on the door. If you have an office or work number people can call to book tickets you could have a system where they phone up to register and you either take card payment (if you have the facility) or take payment on the door. It's important that there are a reasonable number of hours per day that someone will be available to take calls and a clear answer phone message for out of hours calls. People could also register by email but they would have to pay on the door. The limitation of this system is that many people will register without paying which will mean you cannot guarantee numbers. If people pay in advance they are much more likely to turn up and paying on the door requires good and reliable volunteers and efficient organisation both before and on the day.

Just charge entry at the door. As long as you are not expecting to be hugely overcapacity on the night you can just ask people to pay on the door. This means you will not have much indication of how many people are planning to attend but keeps things simple. If

## **11. VOLUNTEERS**

If you are selling tickets you will need to have a couple of volunteers available to help with this. You may also need people to serve or sell refreshments. To help with the smooth running of the event it would be good to have two people who are not core team members there on the day to welcome people and make sure everyone is having a good time. This means core team members will have the time to make sure everything is running smoothly and to solve any problems that may arise.

Crucially, you need your church members to be there to get to know their neighbours and not just to have fun. You should also prepare your congregation to come, ready to get involved, get the dancing started and chat to people who come to the event. No one should be able to come to the event and not have a conversation with a church member all evening.

## **12. ON THE DAY**

Here's a list of things to do on the day to ensure a smooth running event:

- Visit or call the venue early in the day to make sure they've remembered the event is happening!
- Phone the Ceilidh caller/band to check they're happy with everything for the evening. They will need to arrive about an hour before they play to set up.
- Arrive at the venue around 2 hours before the event to set up the space.
- Make sure the PA, decorations, lighting and refreshments are all set up and ready to go.
- Risk assess the venue using the form on our website.
- Arrange to meet with the host for the night before the event to talk through the schedule and answer any questions they might have.
- Ask the band/caller to give you a list of all the songs being played. You will need this for licensing purposes.

- Make sure there is water on hand for the host/caller/band throughout the show.
- Make sure you clearly communicate the follow up opportunities you have planned.
- At the end of the night be sure to clear up thoroughly, thank the venue and ask for any feedback they are able to offer on how the event went.

### ***How to share the meaning behind the event!***

You'll want to make sure that people don't just go away having enjoyed the event but that they've also been challenged or intrigued about the Christian faith. However you choose to present the gospel, it must be short and informal and should not leave anyone feeling like they have been tricked into coming to be preached at! Here are five ways you can share the meaning behind the event on the night.

Get the host to introduce the event Ceilidh with a little bit about why the event is taking place  
Welcome to the Ceilidh brought to you by <insert church name here>. We're here tonight in celebration of the biggest birthday party ever – the birthday of the church.

Read a poem or short story.

According to Alexander Carmichael, one of the earliest literary mentions of 'ceilidh' it is a place where stories and tales, poems and ballads, are rehearsed and recited, and songs are sung, conundrums are put, proverbs are quoted, and many other literary matters are related and discussed

You could therefore have a time in the evening where you read an appropriate poem or story, perhaps of Scottish or Irish origin. You may even want to choose from one of the poems by the above mentioned author.

Because this event is inexpensive to put on and does not take too much planning, if you get a lot of interest in this event it's one that you could easily make into a monthly activity. Think about whether this is something you might like to do ahead of the event and maybe collect emails on the night so that you can let people know about more regular events.

## **STEP 13. WRAP UP AND IMPLEMENT FOLLOW UP**

It's important that this event fits into a wider context of mission. Therefore, get feedback from everyone involved about how they thought the event went. You could ask them to respond to three simple questions:

- What did you like about the event?
- What did you think could have been done better?
- If we were to run the event again what changes would you suggest?

You could also ask people to leave contact details if they would like you to let them know about similar events in the future. Have a plan in place for your next event so that you can build on the good work you've begun.

## MORE ABOUT SHARE JESUS INTERNATIONAL



SJI is passionate about communicating the good news about Jesus in our ever-changing times. SJI's work covers three main areas:

1. Missional Leaders – leadership development has long been a focus for SJI. Over the past ten years, our leadership development programmes have seen in excess of one thousand young people trained to serve God in their communities. Find more details on the FRESH programme on our website.
2. Missional Festivals – in 2008 we hosted London's first Pentecost Festival with over one hundred events, many of them free, in the heart of London. Since then the Festival has grown by collaborating with a wide range of organisations and churches. Now we are also training churches to run local festivals in their communities
3. Missional Churches – planting missional expressions of church locally, SJI is working to equip churches across the UK to be missionally focussed

*For more information please visit our website: [www.sharejesusinternational.com](http://www.sharejesusinternational.com)*

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