

16 Steps to the Best Church Staff Christmas Party Ever

[Lori Seed](#)



Christmas is coming. And with it, the annual Staff Christmas Party.

It's a celebration with friends and colleagues. We laugh, feast, remember, have fun, and look forward together.

But there's the pressure. What if it isn't fun? Or inspiring?

How do you know if you've thought of everything to make your Staff Christmas Party a success?

We've tried everything. We've had some highs and some lows. And we've

learned some valuable Christmas party how-to along the way.

Here are 16 time-tested principles and strategies. Use it to double-check your Christmas party plans.

The Pastor's Ultimate Guide to a Successful Staff Christmas Party

1. Define your Purpose

Here's what we try to accomplish at our staff Christmas parties:

- Renew vision for ministry together.
- Feel thanked and appreciated.
- Foster good connections and friendships.

What are your goals for your Staff Christmas Party?

2. Set the Date and Time

Our Staff Christmas party is always on the first Monday in December.

Here's why we picked this date. Nobody has an ongoing commitment for Monday nights. And it's easier, and less expensive, to find a venue for a Monday night. Most Christmas parties are on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday nights, or on Sunday afternoons.

We schedule our party from 6:00 to 9:00 pm.

Yes, it's a rush for spouses who work downtown to get there. But there are always late arrivals, so you might as well get the party started in time to do everything you want to do.

3. Invite the Right People

We invite all paid staff, including those who receive a small stipend. We invite the Leadership Board. And we invite their spouses.

Spouses live a ministry life, too, and they need the fun and vision of the Christmas party as much or more.

We avoid "plus one" which means that single staff people don't bring a guest. This is a vision and community night, and a non-staff date dilutes the camaraderie.

If there is a ring on the finger, the fiancée is invited.

We also don't invite key volunteers. They are invited to other parties. This Christmas party is for people who get a paycheck, the Board, and all the spouses. That's it.

4. Find the Budget

How much money you have to spend constrains the party you plan.

It's not a normal line item in the budget at our church, so we get creative.

Some years we've designated part of the Christmas offering. Other years a Board member or two have covered the cost. Sometimes it's a generous donor in our church. Some years we had a small staff appreciation budget that covered a chunk of it.

Two Budget Planning Questions

1. Where can we find some money to budget to the Christmas party?
2. How much can we plan to spend per person?

5. Choose the Venue

I think it's better to go off-site.

Here are some of the venues we've used:

- Second-tier country clubs or golf courses. They are glad for the year-end Monday night business and will work with a small budget.
- Italian Restaurants: Spaghetti Factory, or in our neighborhood, Ciao's.
- Local Museums or Historical Buildings: in our county, the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum.
- Nearby colleges' event rooms.
- Other interesting restaurants with a large room, like the Green Dragon Tavern and Museum near us.

Some years we have had the party at the church, and catered it. Those parties take more effort, and may be harder to make memorable, but they have the big benefit of being more affordable.

One year when the budget was really lean, we had a potluck at the church.

Here's our secret process to finding a good venue that we can afford:

1. We brainstorm ideas of local restaurants and clubs that have a room that will hold us. This may involve some recon around town.
2. The person responsible for finding the venue calls and tells them you're interested in having a Christmas party there. They'll transfer you to the sales coordinator.
3. Explain that you're looking to have a Christmas party for the staff for your church and unfortunately have a tight budget to work with. (It's a non-profit that helps your community, etc, etc.) Tell them the day that you're looking for to see if they are available. If you're doing this at the last minute you may be able to get a better deal because they know they won't have anything else that night. You're looking for a place that feels that slim margins are better than an empty room.
4. Apologetically, tell them you need to have a budget of \$25 (or maybe \$30) inclusive per person. Be sure that they know it includes tax and tip, or they may agree to your price, but then add 20% and 20% on top of that.
5. Tell them that you will be very flexible about the menu to get that low price.

Some places won't be the least interested, but chances are that you'll find a place that is.

6. Decide on the Menu

Any venue should give you a three course meal: salad, main course, and dessert. And simple beverages: water, iced tea, and coffee. Buffets are more expensive than plated dinners because people don't take what they can eat from a buffet – they take what they can fit on their plate.

If you are working with an event venue that is giving you a budget price, be easy about the menu.

We say "chicken in a white sauce" which is code for inexpensive. They like to hear "chef's choice," too.

You may be able to pick the kind of green salad, the kind of rice or potatoes, the kind of vegetable, and the kind of dessert.

Always choose something chocolate for dessert because the chocolate lovers in the room (and you know who they are) will not be satisfied without chocolate.

Dinner service usually takes an hour. Ask them to drop the salads when it's time to start eating, not to pre-set them because they wilt, and it's just nasty to have people walking around and talking with the salads sitting on the table.

They will provide a vegetarian option, and will do gluten-free versions of the meal, too. Just ask.

7. Work out the BEO (Banquet Event Order)

The Banquet Event Order is the document that summarizes the arrangements you've made with the venue. They use it to communicate the details about your event to the staff who will be working that evening. You use it to confirm your plans.

The BEO includes things like:

- the number and kind of tables
- if you need a podium and a mic
- what color tablecloths and napkins you want

- what time you want the meal to begin
- the menu you've chosen
- the final number of guests you expect

The venue will want the final number of meals you want by three to seven days before your party. They will prepare 3% above the number you give.

It's normal to have people who can't come at the last minute, but you will still pay for their meal, so we always order a few less meals than we have people who have said they are coming. That feels a little risky, but it's worth it because the venue makes a few extra meals and you won't feel good about paying for meals that aren't eaten.

We bring in our own sound system and video equipment. Venues charge a premium for tech, and seeing as how we do it every weekend, we're pretty good at it. You are, too, I bet.

8. Talk about Attire

It's not easy to please everyone. Some of your staff like to get dressed up. Others don't have anything dressy they feel comfortable in, so they will come to the party feeling out of sorts.

We try to "make some of the people happy some of the time." Some years we go dressy. Some years we do jeans and cowboy boots. Some years it's just Christmas colors and they can choose how dressy or not they are.

Be sure to mention attire on the invitation, or your staff will waste time asking each other about it and feeling some angst guessing what's expected. And some will feel awkward as they arrive feeling that they chose wrong.

Attire can be:

- Festive
- Casual Dressy
- Casual

Or you can call it whatever you want.

9. Send Invitations

Once you've worked out the details, send an invitation. In the mail.

You can tell them about the date and time before you get the invitations out if you're working behind schedule. So parents have time to arrange childcare. The invitations should go out at least three weeks in advance.

Here's what to include:

- Date and time
- Location
- What to wear
- Anything special you want them to know or bring
- Who and deadline to RSVP

10. Give a Gift

Budget always constrains, or we would give fantastic gifts.

Here are some of the things we've done:

- T-shirts
- Planners
- Books
- Gift cards

To Gift Exchange or Not?

If you really don't have budget to buy staff and board a small gift, then have a gift exchange. We've exchanged books most successfully. Or gift cards.

11. Plan Seating Arrangements

If you're having the party at an event venue, at round tables, decide in advance who will be at a table together. You'll ensure that your leaders will have a better time together if you don't leave it to chance.

We tend to put ministry teams and friends together. You want people to feel happy when they see who they are spending the evening with. Round tables of 8 (or a 9th when needed) are normal.

We've done family style at 8' tables when we've had the party at the church. Probably skip seating assignments at family-style tables.

12. Decorate

If you have the party off-site, you don't need to do much about decor. That's one of the things you're paying for. The venue will probably be decorated for Christmas, and the setting itself is attractive.

If you choose a rustic site, like a barn – like the year we were at the Steam Engine Museum – go with more casual attire, and a more casual menu. Don't ask women to wear heels when they're walking on dirt.

If you use your church, you'll want to go to more trouble to make it feel special. Use string lights, artificial Christmas trees, and lots of candles. Rent tablecloths, and use Christmas paper plates and napkins.

Like in your home, decorate most what people will see first.

Pre-set the plates on the table for more impact, plus then people already know where they are sitting once they have their food.

You will probably need to come up with centerpieces. Check Pinterest, or do what's trendy in your area.

One year the centerpieces we got at Big Lots caught on fire. Hal was speaking, and one table erupted in flames – 4' flames shooting up from the center of the table. The fire was quickly extinguished, the other centerpieces doused before they lit up, and we made a Christmas party memory that we still laugh about.

13. Entertain Them

You don't have to have entertainment every year, but it adds to the party if you have a good source and you can afford it.

Here are some of the things we've done:

- A local Christian singer
- Our worship leader leading us in Christmas carols
- A drum circle
- A college madrigal group
- A chili cook-off
- A game-show style game led by a staff pastor

Make 'em Laugh

Be sure that they laugh out loud some time during the evening. It might be while sharing stories around the table, or during a game or a story.

14. Cast Vision for Ministry

Pastor, you should talk for 15 minutes. Recap what they have accomplished for the year. What God has done. The people you've helped. The salvations you've seen.

Appreciate and thank them for their ministry for the Lord. Tell them what the Bible has to say about their hard work for the Lord.

And cast vision for what you see God doing in the coming year. What are your dreams and plans? What is your staff already working on for the new year? What significant ministries do you do every year? Where is ministry expanding?

Give them hope for the future.

Point them to Jesus

Talk about the Bible and be sure that they pray around their table, or that someone prays from up front at the beginning and the end of the party.

15. Plan the Agenda

Pastor, you should emcee the evening, and bring that short message. Beyond that, decide who else should lead parts of the program.

Here are the normal elements in a Christmas party agenda:

- Welcome and opening prayer
- Dinner and dessert
- Entertainment, games
- Video
- Pastor speaking
- Some meaningful sharing or fun around the table
- Prayer

Don't let the program go any later than 9:00. People will start to slip out to send their babysitters home.

16. Add Sparkle

Surprise them with something unexpected. Something that delights them.

- It might be a Lindt chocolate truffle at every place setting on the table.
- It might be a poem that recaps the year, written and performed by one of your staff or board members.
- It might be the opportunity as they arrive to make a Dr. Seuss-style accessory to wear for the evening.
- It might be a photo booth.
- It might be a video capturing the best moments of the year.

Now What?

Use these 16 steps to double-check your Staff Christmas Party plans. And throw a party that inspires and refreshes your staff!

Further Reading

- [How to Make this the Best Christmas Ever](#)
- [How to Win the Hearts of Christmas Visitors](#)

Hal Seed is the founding and Lead Pastor of [New Song Community Church](#) in Oceanside, CA. He mentors pastors who want to lead healthy, growing churches with resources at www.pastormentor.com.

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