

LET'S CELEBRATE ALL SAINTS DAY

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All Saints Day is always the first day of November. Halloween, as its very name suggests, is the day before All Saints Day. I find it strange that many Baptist churches do not celebrate All Saints Day, but instead celebrate Halloween: or rather, they mark it by holding some kind of anti-Halloween event, without giving any thought to the positive content of All Saints Day itself.

We always celebrate All Saints Day on the Sunday nearest to it. This year that Sunday is Halloween, so this will become our Saints Day. In this respect I note that this year in the Church of England lectionary provision is made for All Saints Day to be celebrated on the 31st October rather than on the 1st November.

All Saints Day is the day when traditionally Christians remember with thankfulness all those who have died in Christ. My own practice is to write to the relatives of all those whose funerals we have taken over the past year (this incidentally requires careful record keeping, for a good number of these relatives have no connection with our church, or indeed with any church) and invite them to a special service of thanks giving for past loved ones – as a result there are always a good number of non-Christian families present at the service.. I also write to all those in the church who have lost a close relative in the year, whose funeral we did not take (again, this requires careful record keeping – fortunately we often note in our church magazine when somebody has lost, for instance, their father or mother). In addition I publicise the service in the church, making it clear that we will also be remembering all those whose dreams were crushed with a miscarriage or a still birth.

The service itself is drawn up with the needs of the bereaved in mind. There is always a sermon, in which we spell out the difference that Jesus makes to living and to dying. This year, for instance, I shall be preaching on the subject of 'A New Home' which Jesus has in store for us (John 14.1-2).

The most moving part of the service, however, is the prayers. I begin by reading out the names of those whose funerals we have taken – and then give people an opportunity to silently thank God for other loved ones, whether or not they have died in the past 12 months or not. We also remember in the silence those who have experienced a miscarriage or a still-birth - for some that is a very important inclusion. Then we give people an opportunity to come forward and light a small candle in memory of a loved one – for many this is an immensely moving experience and many a tear is shed. We then move into prayer, praising God for the living hope that is ours as a result of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and praying that God will comfort those who mourn, giving them the strength and the courage they need for the living of their days.

All Saints Day is indeed a good day to celebrate.

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