

# Pastors seek to shape how members respond to Halloween

October 21, 2022

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—As millions of Americans celebrate Halloween, many Protestant pastors in the United States are encouraging their church members to respond to the holiday in specific ways.



Volunteers photograph costumed children at a fall festival at First Baptist Church in Cedar Hill. (File Photo)

More than 7 in 10 (71 percent) pastors say they encourage church members to invite friends or neighbors to church events on or near Halloween, such as a fall festival or trunk-or-treat, according to a [Lifeway Research study](#).

Nearly 3 in 5 (58 percent) pastors say they want church members to build relationships with neighbors who trick-or-treat. And 1 in 3 (34 percent) pastors encourage church members to hand out gospel tracts to trick-or-treaters.

More than 3 in 4 (78 percent) Americans plan to celebrate Halloween this

year, according to a [Numerator survey](#). But not all pastors want their church members to take part.

Lifeway Research found about 1 in 8 (13 percent) say they encourage people in their congregations to avoid Halloween completely. Others don't try to push their congregations in any direction regarding the holiday, with 8 percent of pastors saying they don't encourage their church members to do any of these things.

"Few pastors simply ignore the fact that so many Americans participate in Halloween celebrations," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. "Most pastors focus on the social nature of these celebrations, encouraging their congregations to engage with others outside their church."

## **Growing encouragement to engage**

[Compared to 2016](#), pastors are more likely to seek to influence their church members' engagement in Halloween festivities this year. And the largest increase is in handing out gospel tracts. Whereas 26 percent of pastors encouraged their church members to hand out gospel tracts to trick-or-treaters in 2016, this year, 1 in 3 (34 percent) pastors are doing the same.

But pastors are also more likely to encourage their congregations to engage in the holiday in other ways. In 2016, 67 percent of pastors encouraged their church members to invite friends or neighbors to church events. This year, 71 percent of pastors are encouraging the same.

Pastors also are more likely to encourage church members to build relationships with neighbors who trick-or-treat this year (58 percent) than in 2016 (52 percent). As churches continue to [recover from the impact of COVID](#), many may be trying to reconnect with their members and communities and see Halloween as an ideal [opportunity for this](#)

[engagement.](#)

While some pastors are more likely to encourage their churches to engage in Halloween this year, a minority are more likely to encourage church members to avoid the holiday completely. While 8 percent of pastors encouraged their church members to avoid Halloween in 2016, 13 percent are doing the same this year.

## **Pastors more outspoken**

No matter their take on Halloween, pastors are holding to their stances more firmly and are more likely to vocalize those ideas for their congregations.

“Whether it comes from a desire to reconnect with their community after the pandemic prevented much of this or from deepened convictions about the holiday itself, pastors appear more resolute in their convictions around Halloween,” McConnell said.

Fewer pastors are refraining from influencing their church members’ engagement with Halloween at all. Whereas 12 percent of pastors said they were not encouraging their church members in any of these ways in 2016, 8 percent of pastors say the same today.

This year, even more pastors view Halloween as an opportunity to engage neighbors in at least some capacity.

Younger pastors are more likely to encourage their congregations to engage in Halloween by inviting friends and neighbors to church events or by building relationships with neighbors who trick-or-treat. Pastors ages 18-44 and 45-54 are among the most likely to encourage members to build relationships with neighbors (66 percent and 63 percent, respectively) and to invite neighbors to church events (78 percent and 79 percent,

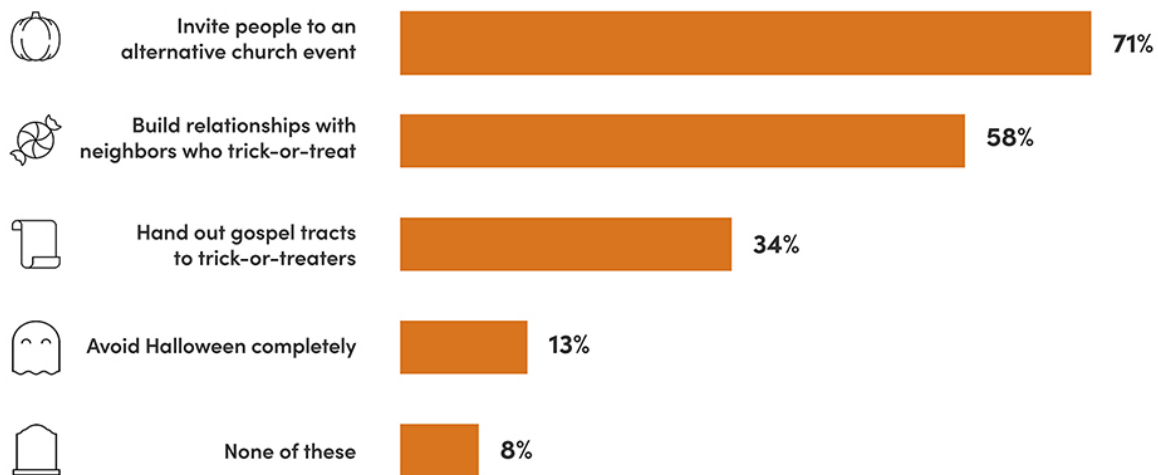
respectively).

Older pastors are more likely to encourage their churches to hand out gospel tracts to trick-or-treaters. Those 55-64 (38 percent) and older than 65 (37 percent) are among the most likely to encourage church members to give out tracts.

“The majority of even the smallest churches offer church events this time of year and encourage their members to invite people from the community,” McConnell said. “In a society that is increasingly distant and divided, most pastors see opportunities within the interactions that take place around Halloween.”

### What do pastors encourage their church members to do at Halloween?

*Among U.S. Protestant pastors*



Lifeway **research**

LifewayResearch.com

## Regional and demographic differences

Other factors also indicate a pastor's likelihood of encouraging engagement with the holiday. White pastors are among the most likely to encourage their congregations to build relationships with neighbors (61 percent) and

invite neighbors to church events (73 percent).

Pastors in the South are also among the most likely to encourage church members to hand out gospel tracts (38 percent) and to invite neighbors to church events (75 percent).

Evangelical pastors (42 percent) are more likely than mainline pastors (28 percent) to encourage members to hand out gospel tracts. And Baptists are the most likely to encourage the same (58 percent).

Pastors older than 65 are among the most likely to encourage their churches to avoid Halloween completely (20 percent) and are the most likely not to encourage their churches to respond to the holiday in any of these ways (14 percent).

African American pastors are also among the most likely to encourage their church members to avoid the holiday (32 percent) or not encourage their congregations in any direction regarding the holiday (19 percent).

In terms of church size, pastors of churches with fewer than 50 in attendance are among the most likely to encourage their congregations to avoid Halloween completely (16 percent).

The phone survey of Protestant pastors was conducted by Lifeway Research Sept. 6-29, 2022. Analysts weighted responses by region and church size to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys, providing 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.2 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.