

Narnia Film Draws Crowds To Box Office and Churches

The much-anticipated Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe raked in a whopping \$65 million domestically at the box office, securing its place in best-opening-weekend history at No. 23. But more important than Walden Media and Disney's collective payoff is how the film's underlying message ranked in the hearts of moviegoers.

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Torrance, Calif., rented out two showings opening weekend. Members were encouraged to bring along unsaved friends. A fellowship night commenced directly after the movie, where both kids and adults created ice cream sundaes and played Narnia-themed trivia games with prize giveaways.

"We sent out 10,000 postcard invitations, gave away Narnia-themed booklets and sold over 400 tickets," said pastor Bob Rognlien, who preached a Narnia-themed series that began Christmas Eve. "We wanted to make a connection with people so that they'd come back for the series."

Pastor Bruce Cadle transformed his New Hope Church in Melbourne, Fla. , into the fantasy world of Narnia, complete with wardrobe and falling snow. "The response was just incredible," Cadle told Charisma. "We saw a 50-person increase in one week. Almost all of them said they'd be back and would bring visitors."

Many pastors got their creative inspiration and materials from

Narnia Sneak Peak Events organized by the Mission America Coalition. The group's goal was to encourage church leaders "to consider the fantastic ministry opportunity" provided by the film. In cooperation with Outreach magazine, Mission America held events in 150 cities nationwide.

"We were so blessed by their personal support," said René Bogue, service coordinator at New Life Foursquare Church in Canby, Ore. "This was a good wake-up call. Many people did not know the story was a Christian allegory."

Mission America's outreach ideas included organizing book giveaways, forming Narnia-themed reading groups, buying out entire theaters and having children act out scenes from the story. Pastor Dave Johnson of Kalamazoo Community Church in Michigan said his church sold out almost 400 tickets in less than an hour. "We were pretty impressed by the reaction," he said.

The positive response prompted them to purchase 400 more tickets, which also sold out. Members and guests received gift bags filled with Turkish Delight and a copy of Knowing Aslan, which explores the parallels between Aslan's character and the character of Jesus.

Just weeks after the film released, Mission America was getting feedback from churches that hosted Narnia outreach events. Deacon Godsey of Trinity Church in Omaha, Neb., said 40 people accepted Christ after a showing. "And 20 others rededicated their lives," he said. "I'm convinced we might encourage members to send thank-you letters to Disney for making the movie."

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