

Protecting Our Parishes

Installing Christmas Lights and Decorations Without Injury

The level of activity at our Schools and Churches ramp up considerably toward the end of the year. Staff and volunteer workers play a critical role in planning, setting up and dismantling for fall festivals, craft shows, and Christmas concerts and dinners. Volunteers, especially older or inexperienced younger ones, can be more at risk of an injury if they are not familiar with tasks to be performed. Their physical and mental condition may not be suited for a particular job; therefore, matching skill levels and physical ability is key in preventing mishaps. As a general rule, do not allow retirement-age volunteers to use a ladder. While some in this group may have the ability to safely use a ladder, the tasks requiring them should be matched with younger adults.

Guidelines for Four Common Christmas Holiday Activities

■ Christmas Lights

- Ensure any decorative lights used are Underwriter Laboratory (UL) listed and follow manufacturers guidelines for combining lights—typically no more than three strings together.
- Ensure outlets are not overcrowded with excessive plug-ins.
- Lights placed in an outdoor setting must be rated for outdoor use—GFCI-protected outlets should always be used.

■ Ladders

- Only physically fit and mentally alert persons should use a ladder.
- It is best not to allow retirement-age volunteers to use a ladder.
- Inspect all ladders before use—check for integrity and stability.
- Use appropriate ladder for the task—do not use metal ladders for electrical work—ensure a minimum duty rating II (225lbs).
- Ensure ladders are placed on even surfaces.
- Use ladders with a buddy system, one person on the ground.

■ Setting up Manger Scenes, Christmas Trees, Wreaths and Angels

- Create a plan and give a briefing to all volunteers before you start any work. Include how you will move large objects or heavy loads.
- Review safe lifting practices to help prevent back injuries.
- Do not allow workers to carry heavy or large objects alone.
- Make sure decorations are attached in a manner that won't fall or come loose.
- Contract with licensed and insured vendors to install items that require heavy lifts or attachments at extended heights.

■ Parking Lot

- Use attendants with reflective vests and flashlights for evening activities.
- Use traffic cones to help improve flow control.
- Communicate with cell phones or radios.



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