

7 Ways to Save Money on Church Craft Supplies

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Anyone who has ever had to buy materials for Sunday school or other church events knows the frustration of working with a limited budget but needing certain supplies to really drive a message home to young people. This guide is designed to help you save money on all your craft needs, with simple solutions that will let you keep more of your precious budget, so you can help your young people in other ways as well. With a little planning, you can see a difference in your costs immediately!

1. Shop at Specialty Stores

Specialty craft stores will often offer a lower price on many of your craft staples, including construction paper, glue sticks, foam cutouts, felt, glitter, and more. Because these are the only items this type of store offers, they will generally give you a better deal than many superstores. This is not to say that you should not shop around before buying, however. You may find that one superstore will offer cheaper glue and a specialty store will sell cheaper glitter and beads.

Another benefit to buying from a specialty store is that they sell things in larger quantities. Because larger superstores do not make much of their money from craft supplies, they are less likely to offer different sizes in the same product. Their selection will also be much more limited. This limited selection and quantity will make prices increase.

When you shop at specialty stores, ask an associate if there is any discount for purchases made by an organization such as your church. These stores may offer incentives for purchasing large quantities of the same thing or may work out a special deal for your particular church. Ask to meet with a manager to find out what possibilities exist to help you save money. Generally, business owners love to help non-profit organizations in exchange for a little free advertising, such as putting a thank-you message to the specialty store in each of your weekly bulletins. It can be something as small as, "Lakefront Church would like to thank Joe's Craft Supplies for their continued support of our youth programs." This type of exchange will keep the stores, and your wallet, from feeling cheated!

Examples of major craft stores to look at include JoAnn's, Michael's, Hobby Lobby, and Hancock Fabrics.

2. Shop After the Holidays

There is no better time to stock up on essentials than after holidays. Generally, seasonal merchandise goes on sale just after a major holiday. Specialty craft and home stores must make room for their next shipment of merchandise for the next holiday, so they are anxious to get rid of the inventory they currently have. You win in this situation, because decorations, tissue paper, and almost anything else in the colors of that holiday will go on sale. For example, everything red and green gets marked down after Christmas, everything black and orange after Halloween, and everything pastels after Easter.

Though it may be hard to justify to some of your coworkers, it is actually smartest to stock up on things you will not need for almost a year. Just because you have finished your unit on Easter does not mean that you should not spend money on Easter supplies and craft ideas. You are going to need them again in a year, so there is no reason not to save 50% now on the same supplies you will be buying in a year. It takes planning and a shifting in ways of thinking about shopping, but you will soon see that shopping after every holiday helps you stay on top of supplies and budget.

Take advantage of these deals by looking for advertisements in the local papers the week of the holiday. Most stores will advertise their sales a week in advance. Make a list of the most important stores to hit and create a sort of schedule for yourself. If there are high-priced items you need, such as a special type of fabric or certain art supplies, go to the store that has the best deal on that product first. Arriving early and making a list of your favorite stores in a ranked order will keep you from missing out on the best deals. If you don't go to the most essential store first, you may find that their selection will be picked over by midday.

3. Shop Online

Many craft stores offer special deals online that you cannot find in the store. To find out about these deals, sign up on their website for a free mailing or email notices to keep you informed of their upcoming sales. Usually, you can find the same after-holiday sales that you will find in the stores but without the crowds or waiting in line. And, stores often let sales last much longer on their websites than they do in stores.

The selection at online stores is also usually better than that in the store. Stores can only hold so much, but the warehouses of these major companies house much more than can be displayed in stores. For that reason, you can find better selection, quantity, and value than you can in the stores. There are some items that are just easier to buy in-store, including all larger items that will be bulky or even impossible to ship.

When shopping online, plan ahead! Give yourself several weeks to receive the items, because processing the order and getting it shipped can be a long process. Planning ahead will keep you from having to rush-ship the items to your church, which costs much more than standard shipping.

Look for deals on shipping. Most online stores offer discounts on shipping if your purchase totals over \$100, etc, so plan to make one large order instead of several small ones. You will save yourself time and money by putting one order together. It is easiest if you take all the orders in your church for several weeks ahead of time before placing the actual, final order. This ensures that the Sunday school teachers can plan their events, change their minds, and make a final order before you need to begin communication with the online store. If everyone goes together in the purchase, you may receive free shipping or discounted rush shipping. Because shipping charges can quickly add up, this will leave you with significantly more money in your budget than you thought!

When you are shopping online, make sure to read the frequently asked questions, look up shipping charges based on amount of purchase, and look at the returns policy. Hopefully you will not need to return any of your craft supplies, but you should know the policy in case you do. Most places will refund you the purchase price but not the shipping, and you will have to pay to have the items shipped back to the company. Be sure to look for hidden charges, such as a restocking fee for expensive items or a loophole in the shipping policy. The more informed you are when shopping online, the more enjoyable your experience will be.

Excellent online craft stores include Oriental Trading Company, Factory Direct Craft Supply, and Dollar Days.

4. Ask for Donations

Because most of the church members will not have costs associated with the youth education program, they will probably be willing to help you now and again with costs for supplies. Use some of your programs for your own benefit. For example, if you put on a play for a holiday, ask for a donation instead of an admission fee. You could request that everyone bring a craft item, such as a pack of markers or a package of dyed feathers. Let everyone know ahead of time why you need these donations. People are always more generous when they understand and believe in the cause to which they are donating.

Having a joint fundraiser and performance is a great way to stay involved in the church community as a whole. Work with the church leader to develop a program based on a holiday, and work to prepare the students for a performance. Most of them will love getting to express themselves creatively, and it will be a great teaching tool for you. If the words are meaningful and contain a good message, they will learn without knowing it, which is the best kind of learning.

If you can get the support of the other Sunday school teachers and the spiritual leader, there will be few things stopping your performance/fundraiser from going forward. Make announcements at services in the weeks leading up to the performance, and be sure to stay in contact with the parents of your students.

Set up a donation table that people must walk past when they enter the room for the performance. Have someone at the table thanking people for their donations. You could make a sign telling what the supplies will be used for, in case they have forgotten. Be sure to go onstage either before or just after the performance and introduce yourself, thanking your audience for their support and telling them some of the benefits the young people receive from being part of your Sunday school programs.

The next time your class meets after the performance, make a thank-you card, banner, or other display that will thank your church members for their support and donations. This will make them feel that what they have contributed to is worthwhile, and it will build good relationships for the future. It is also a great way to pull in older, wiser church members who might be able to offer some very good advice and leadership for your young people.

5. Buy When Things are on Sale

Even if you don't need a 64 pack of crayons now, you might need them in the near future, so if they are only \$1, buy them! It is very hard for people on a budget to spend money on things they don't currently need, but if done properly, it is a good way to save money. As long as you have enough in your account to last you through the month, you should spend what you can on sale items.

When it comes to the absolute craft essentials, it is always a good idea to purchase them when they are on sale. You can store them away until you need them, and it will save you a trip to the store and a few extra dollars by purchasing them when they are cheap. Pick up a local paper each week and look through the advertisements. Ask to become part of your favorite craft store's mailing list, and you will receive notices by mail of their upcoming sales.

Good things to always stock up on include construction paper, glue, feathers, large beads, paper plates, glitter, pipe cleaners, felt, foam, scissors, crayons, markers, and colored pencils. These items can be used for almost any craft project, and you can never have too much on hand.

To help yourself stay organized when you are stocking up on these items, create a storage system with labels that lets you know where everything is. Buy cheap plastic tubs from a superstore that you can see through. Store similar items in these boxes and clearly label the front with a list of the contents. You can put a number next to the description to help yourself know how many of each thing is in the tub, such as "Markers (5)." This tells you that there are 5 containers of markers in that box. You can change the number as your supplies dwindle. This will help you know when you need to look for sales on those items again. As you replace items, change the labeling system so that you know how many are currently in each tub at one time.

6. Shop at Out-of-the-Way Places

Flea markets, garage sales, and auctions can be excellent places to find craft supplies for almost nothing. While you might not find the traditional feathers-and-construction-paper-type crafts, you might find something even better, or at least more creative.

Auctions and estate sales often sell off old dishes and silverware. These items can be used in craft projects. It does not matter if the dishes match or not, have scratches, chips, or other ugly spots, because you and your students can transform them. Buy some special paint for ceramic or stone materials, depending on the material of your dishes. Let your students paint them, covering up all traces of the pattern underneath. This project is especially good for Thanksgiving, because kids can use their plates as a serving plate for bread or another small item. You can teach them about the importance of giving and receiving, and they can paint their own interpretation of the first Thanksgiving on their plates.

This will be a great memento for your students and their families. It will look much more expensive than it is, and it will be a project that your students probably will never have done before.

This same idea can be used with teacups and other drinking cups. Students can paint them just as they did the plates, but this time, your lesson can involve Psalm 23, where the psalmist speaks to God of His abundance and blessings. The Psalm reads: “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” (King James Version). This could work for Thanksgiving as well, depending on how you would like to structure the class.

You are likely to find random craft supplies at garage sales. People may be selling old scissors, that while they may not be useful for sewing projects or other precise cutting, are perfect for student use in a Sunday school. You may find an old teaching book, old markers and crayons, t-shirts that your students can decorate with the name of your Sunday school, and many other things. The projects that will come out of the materials you encounter at these out-of-the-way sales will push you to come up with new ideas and ways to incorporate the supplies into a Bible lesson, but with some creativity and time you will find their usefulness to make all your purchases worth it.

7. Use Recycled Materials

There is a virtually unlimited number of craft projects you can complete using mostly recycled materials. Cereal boxes, or just the slogans and pictures on them, can be great collage pieces. Milk jugs can be cut and used as the base of a project or the container that it sits in. Aluminum cans can have holes poked in them and be turned into candle holders, with adult supervision of course. Shampoo bottles can be turned into animal art. There is a whole world of recycled crafts that you can use to help save money.

Each of these projects can easily be tied back to a Christian concept or Bible passage, and they will save you tons of money! Instead of putting all these materials into the recycling each week, clean them out carefully and dry them, storing them with other craft supplies.

Using recycled materials is a great way to teach your students about their responsibility to the earth as well. If you ask them each to bring in their own recycled material it will prompt their family to consider recycling if they don't already. It will also give you a chance to tell kids about the importance of keeping the environment clean and healthy so that we will have it to enjoy for generations to come. Because being environmentally friendly is an important moral obligation, it is a great lesson that you can teach your students that they might not get anywhere else. You can show them the importance of using their materials wisely. They will probably never have thought of another use for a milk jug until you show them what can be done with it.

These quick and easy ways of saving money will have you cutting your costs in no time. With a little planning and creativity to you can save money in several different ways. Build relationships with business owners in the community and encourage them to donate to your organization. Return the favor by featuring them in your newsletter or putting their name on your church's sign out front. Ask all the teachers to come up with a list of supplies and buy together so you can save money on shipping and tax. Plan ahead and buy before you need things, especially when you see them on sale. This will keep you from getting in a pinch and running out, and it will give you the flexibility to shop around before buying. Use these tips and see your budget stretch farther than you thought possible!