

UNDERGROUND CHURCH

To the catacombs! This is part adventure game, part worship and celebration. Your kids' first task in this evening event is to elude the Secret Police of a corrupt, anti-Christian government and locate Safe Houses run by the Christian underground. Then they travel to the Meeting House, a secret, secluded location for celebration and worship, with reminders of what ancient and modern Christians have endured in order to meet and worship together.

Get lots of people from church or the community involved. The evening requires planners, Contacts, Safe House owners, Secret Police,

and worship-service organizers. (Delegate!) For practical safety reasons this game must be carried out in a carefully designated area, defined clearly on a map carried by all participants. Choose a neighborhood where traffic is minimal.

The details in the adventure game as explained below can be changed to suit your own community and group. Use more or fewer clues, arm the Secret Police with weapons other than Super Soakers, etc. Make it your event.

• **Background.** The adventure setting is a police state where all Christian gatherings are outlawed. The religious underground has begun a resistance movement, however, to protect and encourage believers. They have organized a clandestine meeting of Christians in their neighborhood.

Thanks to old church membership lists, all believers have been organized into cell groups. For their own protection, they know the identities of neither their own cell members nor those in other cells.

On the event night they will locate their own cell's Safe House and be introduced to other cell members. Before the evening is over, they will meet with the other cells for worship and mutual encouragement.

A week before the event, underground leaders circulate special ID cards and bracelets to identify all believers (see Publicity below). ID cards are color coded by cell group with a small colored dot. Included with them is a map with the first of four clues that eventually lead to the Safe House for a particular cell group.

• **The task of underground members.** On the night of the event—armed with color-coded ID, bracelet, map, and the first clue—kids get their next three clues from three Contacts: two Street Persons and a Store Owner/Manager/Clerk (see Instructions for Underground Contacts). Participants must move about in groups of three or four. Groups smaller or larger than that are strictly forbidden.

When players approach someone they suspect is a Contact, they say the underground passwords, "Do you have any old newspapers to donate?" True Contacts respond, "Come walk on the water." Contacts then check kids' IDs, for they can give clues only to students with their color.

The fourth and final clue takes underground members to their Safe House where they'll be

blindfolded and driven to the secret gathering at the Meeting House.

Believers need a total of four dots on their ID card to get into the Safe House. The bracelet identifies participants to Contacts and other believers. No one is allowed into a Safe House without a bracelet.

As they're searching for Contacts and clues, they must also elude the Secret Police, who are intent on breaking up the resistance movement and discovering the members of the underground. They are everywhere that night, and they have no identifying signs except that they are armed with Super Soakers. When the Secret Police catch believers, they remove their bracelets, blindfold them, and take them to prison.

• **Prison.** Prison is a darkened room at the church. While sitting in the darkened room, prisoners hear sounds of interrogation, torture, and guns firing blanks. Use good judgment as to how much realism is appropriate for your group. From time to time the Secret Police remove one of the prisoners from the room. These are taken to another darkened room, but the people in the first room don't know where their comrades are.

In the end underground commandos rescue their captured fellow believers and take them to the Meeting House, but the commandos act as if not everyone got out alive. Those who died can be memorialized at the worship service. Some groups make it so that the fatal circumstances of these martyrs resemble those of actual martyrs killed by repressive governments in our own day.

• **The clandestine celebration.** At each of the Safe Houses, students are blindfolded and transported by vans and buses to the secret Meeting House—a nearby church, chapel, camp, or retreat center.

Conduct the celebration service according to your group's tastes. A typical one consists of:

—Upbeat contemporary songs as well as some somber, meditative songs.

—The narration or reading of actual

persecution around the world, both ancient and modern, intertwined with a few fictitious stories about underground members who were lost that evening trying to get to this meeting.

—A challenging message.

—Concrete take-home symbols—salvation bracelets, ID cards--reminders of the underground experience.

After the celebration students are transported back to the starting point to be taken home.

• **Publicity.** Here's how you can make this evening a big event—and even get some press coverage if you're lucky.

—**Three weeks before the event.** Youth group members each receive a flier that invites them to a secret underground gathering, with a warning to watch out for the Secret Police. Use the flier provided or design your own.

—**Two weeks before the event.** Polaroid photos of captured underground leaders—along with cassette tapes of their coerced confessions—are circulated at school. Run free radio spots on local stations inviting kids to Go Underground! Spots include the date, time, and starting location. Students receive a Secret Police flier with the photo of a captured underground leader (see the sample). The message is clear: *Don't go underground.*

—**One week before the event.** Students circulate underground bracelets and ID cards. Run a notice in your local paper warning residents that students will be participating in this adventure game. The Secret Police make home visits, warning kids not to go underground. Place signs strategically in neighborhood yards reading GO UNDERGROUND! and DON'T GO UNDERGROUND! or GO UNDERGROUND AT YOUR OWN RISK!

Skip Seibel

