



Grow your
CHURCH
through

Seasonal Celebrations

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Dance and game are frivolous, unimportant down here;
for 'down here' is not their natural place.

Here, they are a moment's rest from the
life we were place here to live.

But in this world everything is upside down.
That which, if it could be prolonged here, would be a truancy,
is likest that which in a better country is the End of ends.

Joy is the serious business of Heaven.

C.S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer

Preach the Word;
be prepared in season and out of season;
correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience
and careful instruction.

2 Timothy 4:1-3

Warning: Dates in Calendar are closer than they appear.

Anon

The incredible potential of seasonal and special events

Easter, Christmas, Fall Festivals, National Holidays, Mother's and Father's Day, plus local holidays or celebrations, can be extraordinary times to reach out to your community, to grow your people in spiritual maturity, and your church in numbers, now more than ever.

Here's why:

- Our world is increasingly post-Christian.
- Though people may not respond to an invitation to church for religious reasons, everyone still celebrates holidays and special events.
- Many people don't have family close by and are lonely at holiday times.
- Many people don't have the money for a special holiday celebrations.
- If your church provides a free holiday events and special event celebrations, many people will come to your church who would never consider attending a regular church service.
- Though your congregation members may be hesitant to do aggressive evangelism, most are willing to invite friends to special events and holiday celebrations.
- If the event is enjoyable and welcoming to visitors and if you give them specific invitations to come back to your church, they will probably visit regular services after the event.
- If you got contact information at your event and at subsequent visits and if your church follows up in a positive, consistent ways, visitors will continue to attend and become part of your church.
- Members will grow spiritually from their involvement with outreach and from seeing their friends become involved with your church and Jesus.
- Outreach will become a part of the DNA of your church as you continuously invite the unchurched to events, equip your people to be inviters, follow up and welcome new members into your church.

Though this can and has happened at many churches it doesn't for many because most churches don't understand and work to implement the **entire process** for achieving success at seasonal and special events. Because most churches only do one or two parts of successful outreach, many churches don't experience lasting growth following them.

Evaluate your current system for celebrating seasonal and special events

You may have worked very hard on seasonal and special event celebrations in the past and yet did not achieve lasting growth. If that is your situation, it may

be helpful before you make changes to understand why what you did in the past didn't work. If your experience with seasonal celebrations hasn't resulted in the response or lasting church growth you wanted, there were reasons for it.

Consider the following list of less-than-effective methods along with the usual reasons for doing them to understand what happened. Though these methods are used in thousands of churches, they aren't often successful. Some may have worked in the past, when our entire society was more Christian, but there are other methods that may be more successful today in our largely secular-minded world. Following the list, the rest of this publication will give you new ideas and communication tools that have made seasonal and special events times of great numerical and spiritual growth for many churches.

Less than effective ways to celebrate seasonal or special events in your church and why churches do them:

- Send out a glossy postcard purchased from a national company and use a mailing service, as the primary communication piece to invite the community to the seasonal or special event because you think a "professional" looking invitation is the most important thing you can do for outreach.
- Mention the event once or twice in the bulletin, because everybody in the congregation knows what the church always does for the holiday or event.
- Ask for volunteers without specific details about what they are needed to do because the event is the same year after year and the same people always volunteer anyway.
- Expect the staff to spend many extra hours needed to put on a successful event because you never have enough volunteers to help.
- Assume that the people outside the church who show up for the event will be so impressed with the church that they will come back next Sunday and bring their kids to Sunday School because you didn't want to bother with getting information from them.

Though the actions above may sound familiar, as I have observed from interacting with many churches over years of teaching church communications in seminars and online, they often don't get the results desired because:

1. The postcard purchased and sent out by a national company often looks just like the card several other churches in town sent out to advertise the same holiday. Even if other churches didn't send out the exactly same card (as often happens in our city around major holidays), the mass-produced mailing did not reflect your church. The postage costs were huge. Because the church (actually the outside company) did all the inviting for the congregation, your people were not personally involved in outreach. Outreach is viewed as something purchased by the church office, not an ongoing action of every member of the church.
2. Church attendance is uneven today because of changing work schedules and family commitments, with some studies showing that less than 20% of

members attend every Sunday of the month. To mention an upcoming event or celebration only a few times in the bulletin results in many members not knowing what was happening, so they don't volunteer to help or invite friends, don't attend the event, and then are upset when they hear about it.

3. Without specific invitations and detailed instructions about what they are needed to do, new members seldom volunteer and the staff and usual volunteers are exhausted and vow never to do this again. New believers and recent members never learn the joy of volunteering or service—without words they are taught that special events are put on only by the leadership or by the “in” group at the church.

4. The people that come to your event from outside the church seldom return because they have no idea what your church does on a regular basis, when or why it does what it does because you didn't tell them. “Sunday School” is not on the radar of most unchurched parents today nor do they intuitively know any reason why they should get up early on a Sunday to take their kids to it.

5. People don't come back, because without thinking, it is easy to make incorrect assumptions about the impact of your outreach efforts. Just because you hold a fantastic musical event or block party, you can't assume people will automatically follow that experience with wanting to attend your worship service on Sunday. Assumptions don't bring people back to the church. To bring people back to church, you need 1) connection cards intentionally filled out at your event or holiday 2) immediate follow up in print and online 3) this follow up needs to consist of invitations to specific events for unchurched people. Anything less won't work if you want people to come back to the church.

6. Your church may not be ready for new people if you did not make sure your church intentionally planned and created newcomer communications and ministries willing to welcome them, explain your church and the Christian faith, and continue to follow up.

The typical low, and little lasting response to seasonal or special events is tragic because, if done properly and strategically, seasonal celebrations and special events can be times of significant outreach, spiritual in members, and overall church growth in numbers.

To do this effectively is a tremendous amount of work, but the results are worth it not only in the number of people who can be added to the church, but in the spiritual growth of your congregation as they are motivated and equipped to be part of the outreach, event, and follow-up process. Effective use of special events before, during, and after the event itself will make evangelism and outreach a natural and continuous part of your church—and your church will grow significantly from it.

To achieve significant church growth like this takes a shift in thinking and the whole process of how to approach these events and the communications you need to create to make them successful, but after you try it, see the success,

and repeat the system proposed a few times, the process will become automatic and reinforcing. Even if you do only some of the strategies recommended, you will see an increased response. As you practice more and more of the recommendations in this system, when you see your congregation fully involved and new people coming to the church, you'll experience the joy of celebrations and you'll look past the work at the continuing growth that will become an automatic part of your church.

You may be thinking that this sounds good, but will it cost a lot of money and will it work for my church? Following are some answers:

Answers to questions you may have about the communications and the process this publication recommends:

- **All of the suggested communications can be created by any church, in-house, and on a very small budget.** This book is not an advertisement for a professional printing company or any expensive set of products. There is nothing inherently wrong with professional printing companies and you can use their services if needed, but you don't have to. You can use color and purchase professional printing processes for the materials and communications suggested, but quality and style of your printed pieces are much more about the image of the church than the effectiveness of the communication pieces. It isn't the style purchased, but the content, type, and frequency of the communications that makes the difference. Simple, clear, and caring always works in church communications and that costs nothing.
- **All of the communications recommended can be produced by anyone with very basic computer skills and equipment.** If needed, additional training is available through <http://www.lynda.com> (the source for training in software, digital and social media applications at \$25 a month for unlimited training) and at <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com> (training in church communication skills, unlimited training for \$9.99 a month for your entire church staff).

In most instances you won't need additional training because you can create very effective communications with MS Word and MS Publisher in print and because of the ease of new systems no advanced computer skills for communications online. In addition, most online communications can be done free with either free email programs or free websites created with programs such as WordPress.

- **All of the communications suggested can be adapted for any denomination, tradition, or size of church, and have been used by many churches all over the world.** Your specific times of celebration may be different, the processes are equally useful.
- **All of the communications recommended are intended for your church to create them in-house by your people.** You have the tools; you know your audience and community best. Spend your money to train your own people to do the work of the ministry.

Our plan for Effective Seasonal Church Celebrations and Special Event Outreach

This publication is an overview, text-only. The print examples of the seasonal publications can be viewed through links to online videos, images, and articles that illustrate the strategies mentioned at <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>. In addition, the expanded print version of this book, with over one hundred additional pages of articles, theory, strategy, additional advice for specific holidays, plus printed examples of the publications (they don't reproduce in the word-based system of digital books I'm using to create this ebook) will be available in October 2011 and links to it will be on the above website.

Even though this version does not have the pictures of the publications used, how publications look **is not the most important issue**. The most important thing is the process that involves all your church in a well-planned, carefully executed, and thoroughly prayed-for process. Let's now get started on it:

For seasonal and special event success—it takes the whole church to grow the church

Everyone in the church needs to be involved for holiday and special events to be successful. Everyone needs to be part of and feel responsible for the outreach and growth of your church. When Jesus said:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

He did not qualify these commands by saying:

"The command to be my witness and to reach your world is only for paid pastors and for rich churches with huge PR budgets."

No—outreach, witnessing, sharing your faith is every believer's task and seasonal celebrations and special events are a great way to be obedient to Jesus' command to be his witness and reach our world. Though everyone should be involved, various parts of your church need to be involved in different ways, meaning in practical terms that the church leadership, communication team, and congregation each have different primary responsibilities. Following is a suggested breakdown of each group's tasks:

Church Leadership

The church leadership decides which events will be celebrated and when. With the communication team, they determine an overall theme and activities not only for the event itself, but how they are going to involve the congregation, follow-up, and evaluate the results. Leadership needs to provide the spiritual guidance and prayer direction for the event. Leadership needs to continuously encourage, motivate, and thank those involved in the event. Leadership needs to decide on the goals for the event and assure accountability for measuring and evaluation to make each event and each year more effective than the last one.

Communications Team

Based on their guidance from the church leadership and their knowledge of the community, the communications team creates print and digital communications for before, during, and after the event that both the church office and the congregation will use. Advertising, website support, PowerPoint, and every social media avenue should be used repeatedly to assure communication saturation. The communications team tracks materials created, sent, frequency, and response to the type and number of communications. During the process, the team continuously prays for wisdom and insight as they create communications for their congregation and for audience receptivity and positive response.

Congregation

The congregation should be involved in every step of the process: motivated by the leaders and equipped by the communication team to pray for the events, volunteer to make them happen, invite their unchurched friends, help evaluate and follow-up with visitors. The congregation has the primary responsibility for inviting and bringing unchurched friends to the event, interacting with them at the event, and following up with them afterwards. This process needs to be continuously taught and reinforced, until it becomes part of the DNA of the church. When the congregation looks at seasonal and special event celebrations with anticipation as opportunities to share the joy of the Christian faith with their unchurched friends, you will experience natural church growth in numbers and in your people in spiritual maturity.

What this whole church approach avoids:

In far too many churches:

- Seasonal celebrations are events the church leadership puts on for the entertainment of the congregation.
- Church tradition is more important than church outreach, so no attempt is made to make seasonal events understandable to unchurched people if they do show up.
- Little to no outreach is done for some holiday events because they are viewed as sinful and worldly.
- Outreach is viewed a commodity purchased, not an ongoing ministry in the

church. Because of that, if the giving is down, outreach is not done.

- Outreach is something that the staff is supposed to do and if the church is not growing it is the pastor's fault or the worship leader's or somebody who is paid to be upfront.
- Seasonal celebrations are seen as promotions put on by professionals—congregational involvement is primarily to provide money to make the production possible.

These attitudes and actions are all unbiblical and ultimately unsuccessful if you want to grow your church and people. They are also deeply sad because the congregation does not experience the joy of sharing the gospel and their church and the community does not experience the joy of getting to know your church and Jesus.

For the holidays and special events to be more than traditional church family celebrations, all the church needs to be involved in new and creative ways; we are all to be Jesus' witnesses. The seasonal times of the year are a great way to reach out. We are all responsible if our church is growing or not. Now let's get practical about how to do that.

The communications needed for successful seasonal and special events

In its most condensed form, what is needed are:

- 1. Pre-event communications** to motivate and prepare your people and communications for your people and the church to use to invite your community to your events.
- 2. At the event communications** to explain the event and your church specifically and the Christian faith overall. In addition, connection cards are essential to provide a way for the church to follow up with attendees on an ongoing basis.
- 3. Post-event communications** to follow-up with attendees and solidify their relationship to your church and the Christian faith.

What makes these three categories above important is that most churches only do the first step, that of inviting people to the event. If the event doesn't make sense or if people don't come back to church, the fault is often laid at the feet of the community—that they don't care, aren't interested, etc. While this reaction is understandable, it is not correct.

Following is an example of the communications created for Easter that illustrate these overall categories.

Many of the materials that follow contain links to the Effective Church Communications website that have downloadable versions of the publications men-

tioned, videos demonstrating the ideas or related materials. Just click on the URL to go to them. If that does not work on your system, go to: <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com> then to the Seasonal tab, and then to Easter category or any of the other holiday links listed below it. They will all take you to numerous materials on the listed holidays. Many of the materials are free for everyone. Some editable templates and sets of ready-to-print materials are available only for Effective Church Communications. Membership is \$9.99 a month or \$99 a year and one membership can be used by all the communicators and leadership of the church. Go to <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/membership/> for more information.

Many of the sections following have the text from these seasonal publications that you can use in your creations. You have permission from Effective Church Communications, to copy, paste, and use any of this material that might be useful to you in reaching your world for Jesus without cost or attribution. You may also take out, copy and share any of these materials with your church staff to motivate them for successful seasonal and special event outreach.

Though Easter is the holiday used below (primarily because this is the one all parts of the Christian family celebrate, though some at different times) the materials can be modified for use for any holiday, seasonal, or event celebration. The print book and the Effective Church Communications website have examples of these types of before, during, and follow-up communications for many holidays and seasonal events.

Communications for before Easter

We need to review in sermons, Sunday School lessons, and in small groups, why we celebrate Easter. We need to discover anew and ponder the incredible miracle of the Resurrection and its central place in the Christian church. The observation of Lent, even for non-liturgical churches, can be an excellent practice to focus on the traditions of the church, self-denial, and the importance of the coming of Easter.

For the article: "Why it's important to remind our congregations about Lent" that also has bulletin inserts that answer the question, click on this link: <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/2011/02/why-remind-our-congregations-about-lent/>

This focus on the biblical and theological basis of Easter celebrations is extremely important. If we want visitors to take our church and the gospel message seriously we need to present it honestly at our events. Though we don't want to be offensive, we also don't need to dumb down the Christian message or try to be excessively cute and catchy to snag people into coming to a church service. The Holy Spirit is active convicting people of their need for a Savior; we need to be honest about how to find Him.

We need to instill in our people the reality of the fate of those who do not know Jesus as Savior.

If our people believe their friends who don't come to church on Easter, miss out on nothing more than free chocolate and brunch, it isn't a very big deal. But if we truly believe that our friends who die without knowing Christ will spend an eternity in darkness and conscious suffering and regret, we may take inviting our friends to hear the Easter message more seriously.

This is not a fun reality to remind people about, but it is our duty to do it. To explain this more and for a free bulletin insert that you can use to motivate your people, go to the article: "Why it matters if you invite friends to church for Easter, and a FREE bulletin insert to help you do it" It is available at this link:

<http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/2011/02/why-it-matters-if-you-invite-friends-to-church-for-easter/>

Below is the text of the bulletin insert you can use to motivate your people to invite friends for Easter:

Here's a great idea—Invite your friends to church this Easter season!

Or 4 REASONS why I should bother to pray, ask, and remind people to come to church when I'd rather just relax and sit around munching the ears off chocolate bunnies.

1. Life is scary

Earthquakes, terrorism, hurricanes, deadly diseases—there is a lot to be afraid of in our world today. But those who have met the One who calms storms know that though the journey might be challenging, we are ultimately promised a safe harbor. Invite your friends to meet Jesus, the only reliable guide through scary times.

2. People are lonely

Lies, abandonment, abuse, disappointment—no matter how wonderful the person or relationship, there are times when the best of human companionship will disappoint. That's because, as St. Augustine said, we all have a God-shaped place inside that only Jesus can fill. Invite your friends to meet Jesus, the only person whose love will never fail through all of life, through death, and into eternity.

3. Everyone needs a purpose

As a former Watergate conspirator said, many folks live their lives climbing the ladder of success only to realize it was leaning against the wrong wall. Jesus' resurrection provides us with the power to live lives of significant purpose and to discern between true and false success. Invite your friends to discover Jesus, the only compass to guide you to a life of genuine, meaningful purpose.

4. *We're all going to live forever*

Most folks today believe that and the Bible agrees. The question is, if you are going to live forever, what neighborhood will you live in? Jesus promises that for those who believe in Him they will live in an eternal neighborhood of light, joy, purpose, and companionship with loved ones. But Jesus won't force anyone to live in His neighborhood. Problem is, any place outside His source of light, joy, purpose, and companionship is an eternal place of darkness, pain, regret, and isolation—not a neighborhood we want anyone to live in. Invite your friends to meet Jesus, so they can live forever in the neighborhood of joy.

Invite your friends to church this Easter season!

This insert fits on half of an 8 ½ by 11 inch piece of paper. On the back, ask members to list the names of friends, neighbors, and people they work with or do business with who they can pray for and invite to church. Challenge them to pray and look for opportunities.

We need to equip our people to be inviters

Now that your people are motivated, you need to give them practical tools to invite their friends to church for Easter. Rather than buying advertising from a company that promises to bring you people on Easter, which means sending the same postcard out from a number of churches in the same community to every household in the area, **equip your people with invitation cards, postcards, door-hangers that YOU create in the church that reflect your church and how you are going to uniquely celebrate Easter.**

Invitation Postcards

Postcards are still one of the most effective communication pieces you can create to invite people to your Easter services. People will look at them, even if only briefly, and if they are at all interested will post them on refrigerator. The refrigerator is communication central for households—get something on the refrigerator, people will be reminded of your Easter events continuously, and there is a high probability the family will attend.

Rather than buy them and pay for an expensive and impersonal mailing campaign, try this:

1. Make up postcards in the church office, the website below has ideas and MS Publisher templates to inspire you. You can modify these designs or come up with your own.
2. You can either print up the postcards in your church office using your copier or digital duplicator or have them printed by an inexpensive online company such as Vista Print.
3. On Sunday put five postcards in every member's bulletin.

4. Have the pastor or other church leader share that this is a tool for the congregation to use to invite their unchurched friends to come to church this Easter. Encourage them to pray and either mail out with a personal note or hand-deliver the invitation.

5. This method accomplishes many purposes: it saves postage costs and church bulk mailing challenges, but more importantly it involves your congregation in outreach. They pray for, invite, and meet unchurched friends for Easter services. They can sit with them at the service and follow up with invitations back to church after the event.

6. For a video of the kind of postcards you can create: <http://www.effectivechurch.com/2011/03/easter-invitation-collection-new-free-or-cheap-video-preview-of-all/>

Easter Invitation Postcards

Following are descriptions and the text of two (several more on the site) of the postcards from the link above:

#1 Postcard/Invitation: Bunny & Cross

On the front of a postcard a picture of a cross and an Easter bunny with a basket of goodies, with the words:

“How is Easter about this (pointing to the cross) and this? (pointing to the bunny and basket).”

On the back it says:

It makes much more sense than you might imagine.

In many cultures bunnies symbolize life, rebirth, and the tradition of a spring bunny bringing gifts to children.

The cross, though once a tool for a tortured death, because of Jesus has become the symbol of eternal life, possible because Jesus rose from the dead.

The Easter bunny tells a story of abundant life, giving, joyful living, pictures of the reality that Jesus made possible on the cross.

Join us for our Easter celebration—we’ve got bunnies and candy for the child in all of us, but we’ll also share about the creator of bunnies, all things joyful and life-giving—Jesus.

#2 Postcard/Invitation: Cross against a cloudy sky

On the front it says: “Why Easter”

and then:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

On the back it says:

Music is inspiring and candy is delicious, but we'd like to invite you to a serious presentation and opportunity for discussion about the true meaning of Easter.

No gimmicks, fluff, or marketing an empty message.

We believe that Jesus lived, died, and bodily rose from death. We have historical, legal, philosophical, and scientific reasons why we believe this and we would like to share them with you.

Not to win an argument, but because we believe the eternal destiny of every person depends on how you respond.

Join us on Easter or check out the websites below:

<http://www.leestrobels.com/>

<http://www.whosjesus-really.com/>

<http://www.ivpress.com/questioningfaith/resources/>

Be creative with social media

Set up a Facebook page about Easter; Tweet, or use whatever social media you are using now and coach your people on how to use them as outreach. Create e-invitations your people can copy and send or sample text they can use.

Teach your people that they are responsible to invite in person, with printed and digital business cards and invitations.

The success or failure of any church outreach event depends on how well everyone in the church works, prays, and invites. For seasonal or special event outreach to have lasting impact, it isn't something the church purchases, it is an activity that involves the whole church.

Your church website—be sure it is ready for Easter visitors and always for when visitors want to check out the church

When you see an advertisement on TV, in the newspaper, or a magazine, what do you do if you want to find out more? Most likely you'll check out the website. We go to websites to find out the details about a potential purchase of any product: how reliable the company is, about the costs and benefits of a possible purchase.

What's true in our everyday perusal of products is also true for the people who check out your church and who will be visiting your church website this Easter season and for other holidays and special events. If you are doing a postcard

mailing, a door-hanger distribution, an advertisement in the newspaper as outreach for Easter or any other special event, before you create or send out the outreach piece, take some time to work on your website, and give it a tune-up, a sort of spring-cleaning before inviting guests in.

Think of your visitors as a company would potential customers

If you invite lots of unchurched people to your Easter events, they may not be church-friendly to start, so you must be brutally honest about what they expect from your church website if they don't have advance positive attitudes about churches. Even if they think favorably about churches, they may not have grown up knowing anything about how churches are organized or how they celebrate events.

In addition to the product information, potential customers make judgments about the company itself from the overall ease of use and completeness of their website. They may test courtesy or response quality of the company by contacting them through the website. How the company responds may influence if they decide to do business with the company. If a company has not updated its website in months, if links don't work, if it was created with forms and has little actual information, if they send an email and no one responds, a potential customer most like won't care about learning any more about the company and certainly won't buy from them. An unchurched person will often make the same decisions based on your website to decide if they will visit you at Easter.

Take time to do this ahead of the holiday itself

As Easter nears and work demands increase, it is easy to forget the website and nothing is worse than for someone to get an intriguing advertisement that makes them immediately go to your website only to find one that you intended to do something with, but never got around to before you sent out the mailing. Good intentions mean nothing on the internet.

Though I'll use Easter as a primary example, these tips apply to any event. Following is a checklist of essentials for your website, pre-celebration tune-up.

Practical website essentials for Easter or other seasonal or special events:

- **Have a "If this is your first visit with us" section.** People might think they have to dress up for Easter. If most folks do at your church, you may want to let them know that. If your church is Southern California casual (where I live and where anything outside of a swim suit is OK), let them know that.
- **Give away something.** Don't make the website just one big "Come and see how great we are" destination. Items to help them celebrate Easter are always appreciated. Two possible ones would be:
 - **A recipe for Greek Easter Bread:** everybody loves recipes and this one

is fantastic. Here is an article that you can go to, that has the recipe and additional ways to use it for outreach: <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/2011/03/recipe-for-greek-easter-bread/>

- **Celebration ideas for positive things to do with and for children:** A wonderful way to help parents and others who care for children is a handout about Resurrection Cookies. You could have it on your website in a ready-to-download and print PDF. The link below takes you to free download of why do the cookies (to teach kids about Easter), how to do them, and the recipe and verses that go along with it, all ready-to-print. You have my permission to copy, print, make a PDF, put these on your website or run off as many as you want for your church and guests: Here is the link to the article:

<http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/2009/03/childrens-resurrection-cookies-for-easter-outreach-teachin/>

- **Clarify the parking situation.** On Easter some churches have off-site parking, whatever it is let them know about it. Provide maps and directions.
- **Be sure to have a section titled “What we do when it isn’t Easter” and explain what we do on a regular basis.** Invite people back for your regular service and ministries and let them know your regular events and times. This is essential because most churches don’t even have the same number of services at the same times and certainly don’t have brunch, a petting zoo, and special music every week like they do for Easter.
- **Answer the special questions Easter brings up.** Have questions and answers about life after death, the resurrection, many of the questions about Jesus, why he had to go to the cross and what his death accomplished.
- **In the midst of doing special things for Easter, don’t forget to be incredibly clear about why you do what you do for Easter.** Explain them, keeping in mind that many of the traditions that are treasured activities to the long-time members of your church, many mean nothing to someone who does not attend church regularly. Be sure your guests know who the events are for, e.g. some events for children may have age limitations. Explain anything that may be a cause for confusion for a guest.

Essential website care on an ongoing basis

Just like we often clean the house before a special event, now is a good time to make certain that various house-keeping tasks are taken care of for your website. Some of these include:

- **Updated and complete bios of your staff.** People want to know who your leaders are—their background, education, why they do what they do. In an age when almost all business leaders have Facebook pages, blogs, YouTube channels, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts for maximum exposure, for your church leaders to not have at least an updated and complete bio on your website does not communicate a positive image of your staff or of credibility for the church. Having a staff page with only half the staff having pictures or complete information is even worse. If the church leader is not able to do this

for him or herself, as is often the case when the leader is a baby-boomer who went to seminary prior to the days of the personal computer, assign a “web buddy” to update or create this content. Helping each other out with technology is a wonderful expression of how we can serve and support one another in the church.

- **If you give out staff email addresses (and you should) be sure staff is committed to answering their email in a timely manner.**

There is no shame in having someone answer your emails if you can't do it and if it is clear who the message is from. It can be a spiritual disaster, as well as certainly rude, if you post an email address, people contact the church, and no one responds. You can be quite certain if that happens that the person who was ignored will not attend your holiday event, nor will they respond to your future invitations no matter how much you spend to advertise.

- **Be sure ALL ministries have descriptions and updated schedules.**

Without this very basic information your church will not be taken seriously by visitors. Think about it: would you do business with a company that did not tell you when it was open; what products or services it offered or anything about the staff? Ask yourself what you would want to know about a church and its programs and be sure you have complete information on the website to answer those questions.

- **Be sure to have a clear explanation of the Christian faith.** It is astounding to me, how few church websites have information on what it means to be a Christian, how one becomes a Christian, and links to either pages on the website or to other sites that answer questions about the Christian faith. Having a church statement of faith doesn't count. Most of those make no sense at all to an unchurched person. Check out your site—what do you have on it in these areas? If not, you may want to take some time and create sections that clearly share your faith in the way an unchurched person can understand.

The richer the content of your site, the more credibility you will have

There are so many other areas you could put on your site—practical, theological, informational, serious, fun. Again, just like a company with skimpy content would not be viewed as professional as one with lots of content, a church with only a few pages half full cannot expect to be taken seriously.

For example, in the children's ministry area you could not only have the basics about what you teach, what the children do, how you screen your workers, who to contact about the program, times, dates, etc., but you could also have practical parenting tips, a Q & A section hosted by your children's pastor, downloadable resources for parents and children.

On other sections of your website, you can attach blogs, link to other helpful sites, whatever you can think of to connect with people who are looking for the answers to life. If you have videos or photo galleries, be sure you explain what people are looking at.

Content, not images is what is important

Contrary to what many companies try to tell you so that you will buy their services, people are NOT primarily impressed by the images on your website. Nobody who is considering attending an Easter service, checks out your website to see what typeface you are using and decides against you because you used Papyrus in your Easter PR or says to their spouse, “Oh, we’ve got to go to this church—their color palette and choice of graphics was spectacular!”

People connect with your church based on your website if your content is clear, complete, answers their questions, and meets needs. In addition, many of the websites with overly complex images can’t be viewed or navigated successfully on mobile phones—make certain yours can. If your main church site is a logistical nightmare, you can create a simple site for Easter with WordPress. WordPress sites are free to create and are hosted for free. In addition they are automatically accessible with a mobile phone—that is ability built into the system. Here is an article that will show you how to create a site, simply and easily:

<http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/2010/06/e-book-how-to-create-free-websites-blogs-with-wordpress-com-pt-1/>

If you are not familiar with WordPress it sounds too good to be true, but it really is one of the most incredible tools available today—please check out the videos on <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com> about WordPress—you’ll be astounded at what it can do.

Pray for wisdom that the Lord will give you eyes to see the needs of the people in your community, of those who come to your church and that you put on your site whatever is needed to answer their questions and to enable them to trust your church as a place where they can find Jesus.

Communications for Easter week activities that will get people to come back to church after Easter, why, how to do them, and examples of effective ones

In most churches their biggest turnout of the year is for Easter Sunday. This doesn’t happen by accident—churches pour time, money, and resources into their church communications prior to Easter and it pays off with a full-sanctuary for multiple services. However, few churches have a continuing increase in attendance after Easter; the staff is exhausted and wonders if it was worth all the work.

Make your work worthwhile by a strategic use of communications by making Easter a connecting point, not the end result of your interactions with people.

To do this you have to be very intentional not only the communications you

create to get them there, which the previous section showed you how to do, but also in what you give people **at** each event or service during Easter week.

There are three overall areas in which you need to create communications at this time if you want to have your event to result in church growth:

- 1. Connection Cards to get information from visitors so you can contact them after the event.**
- 2. Communications to introduce and connect them to Jesus.**
- 3. Communications to introduce and connect them to your church.**

These three areas of communication are essential to successful outreach and not doing them is the reason many churches get lots of people to seasonal and special outreach events, but get few guests to return or any continuing church growth after the event.

IMPORTANT STRATEGIC TIP: Because you often won't feel like creating these pieces when you are in the middle of your PR and preparing for your event, do these and the follow up materials below up **BEFORE** you start your PR and outreach. You'll be too busy as the pace picks up just before an event and too tired right after it. **DO THEM NOW**—you can create some generic ones that can be modified for seasonal events—once again creativity is not nearly as important as complete and clear information. The Effective Church Communication website has templates and examples that can help you with all of them. Following are specific communication suggestions with tips to make them as effective as possible:

Connection Cards to get information from visitors so you can contact them after the event.

Below is an excerpt from the best-selling book of our ministry: *Church Connection Cards, connect with visitors, grow your church, pastor your people—little cards, big results.*

The communications and actions described in this book are absolutely essential if you want to connect with visitors and grow your church. The book is available in a variety of formats, digital and print and the links to get it are at this end of this section.

Chapter One Introduction: though often overlooked, these little cards can accomplish great things

In church communications, we are often like Elijah when he waited on the mountain to meet with God. We expect him to act through the thunder and storm similar to the flashy multimedia popular today. Though God often uses the great, impressive tools of multimedia we have, he also uses tools that are similar to how he ultimately spoke to Elijah—through a still small voice.

The place of connection cards in your church communication ministry is similar. They may appear tiny and unimportant in the

great scheme of multimedia church communications available, but if you don't use them correctly, your church will probably not connect with visitors, grow, or meet the pastoral needs of your members as effectively as it will if you make the most of connection cards.

You can reach out, but if people don't reach back you haven't connected

For example, it is a few weeks from Easter as I write this and in my webinars, and on my website, I've suggested all sorts of communications in print and online that churches can create to connect with visitors to tell them about the church and to invite and encourage them to return. But helpful as they are, they fall short in one area. Their shortcoming is that all of them require the person to come back to you.

You can't reach back to visitors if you don't know they are there. You have no idea how they responded to the message or your church. You have no idea if they have a question you can answer or a hurt you can help to heal. Your congregation can be awed by your special music, but if they have no way to connect back to you, you might not know that a family lost their home last week, that a single parent needs prayer to keep looking for a job, or the joy of a father when a daughter or son is home safe from deployment overseas.

Connection cards are in many ways the foundation of all other communications in the church. *They are often what start the interaction between your church and a visitor; they are often what keep the relationship going with members once they join your church.*

This publication will give you:

- a vision for why you need to take the time to create these cards
- how to make sure you get a maximum response from them
- how to follow up in ways that will grow your church and minister to the needs of your people

This book will provide detailed instructions and practical advice from the many years I have worked with church communicators, evaluated and collected many cards, discussed their use with people who have attended my seminars, as well as personally using them extremely effectively in the various ministries my pastor husband and I have led.

If you carefully go over these materials and prayerfully apply them, I truly believe you will be astounded at how God take a seemingly little thing and use it greatly to grow your church and ministry to your people.

Following this introduction are over 100 pages of examples, instructions, tips on how to use the cards most effectively. As part of the example section is the following:

Special event sign-in cards examples

In addition to making it a priority to use Connection Cards effectively every week, special events provide a unique opportunity to make connections.

Sadly, so many churches work very hard to put on a seasonal celebration or special event and often hundreds of strangers to the church come to the event. However, if they only attend that event and never come back again, there is tremendous lost potential to make lasting connections with your church and ultimately to Jesus.

A Connection Card is a natural and important way to make sure the impact of your special event lasts beyond the event itself.

Sign-in cards for special events don't have to be fancy; you just have to make a connection.

If appropriate, you can offer a prize drawing as an incentive for filling them out, for example:

- A big pumpkin filled with Halloween goodies.
- An Easter basket filled with Easter Candy.
- A giant Christmas stocking filled with yummy treats.
- A gift certificate appropriate to the holiday.

If you wanted to do more than one gift, you might get donations from local businesses.

Here is some sample content you might put on a Special Event Connection Card:

Easter Event Sign-in Card

We are so glad you're here! Please take a minute to fill out this card so you can be entered into our door-prize drawing and so that we have a record of your attendance so we can contact you about future events for your family. Be assured this information will not be shared or used outside the church office and you can have your name removed at any time by calling the church office at 555-555-5555.

Parent's Name

Names of Children and ages:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

The book continues with many more ideas and specific ways to follow up. The ideas below are a summary of them:

Be sure to follow up immediately on Special Event Connection Cards in these ways:

- A postcard is a perfect follow-up tool—no one has to bother with opening it up to get the message. Email also works well. Whatever method you choose, be sure to:
- Thank people for coming.
- Let them know what other seasonal events you have coming up.
- Consider sending additional cards with encouraging tips, ideas, for how to celebrate the holidays.
- Send additional invitations.
- **DO NOT worry about being bothersome.** Some churches hold back on follow-up because they don't want to bother people. You aren't being a bother; you are helping people make a connection with the most important thing in their life—a relationship with Jesus. Marketing companies know it takes many repetitions for people to remember your message and to respond—your message is far more important than the latest consumer product and deserves far more persistence as you get it out there.

There is so much more to learn about Connection Cards to make your use of them an effective ministry tool and the full length book, *Connection Cards, connect with visitors, grow your church, pastor your people, little cards, big results*, is available in a variety of formats and prices:

FREE Special Edition, 32-pages; download in many digital reader formats: <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/53563>

Kindle version of the Special edition .99

http://www.amazon.com/Church-Connection-Cards-ebook/dp/B005CHQLYK/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1316894149&sr=8-1

A full-length PDF version of the book 111 pages, special download price of \$5.00: <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/2011/04/new-version-of-connection-cards-book/>

A full-length version print version of the book 111 pages, \$19.99

http://www.amazon.com/Church-Connection-Connect-Visitors-Pastor/dp/1257632809/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1316894149&sr=8-3

Connection cards are incredibly important if you want to grow your church and pastor your people—please do get the book and go on the ECC website (<http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/category/church-communications/church-connection-cards/>) for videos, examples, and more instructions on how to use them effectively.

Communications to introduce and connect people to Jesus

Some current studies show that because people in our post-Christian world know so little about Jesus and the Christian faith that it often takes seven or more (think multiple, at least) exposures to the gospel message before someone can make an informed decision to follow Jesus.

People simply do not have the exposure to the Christian message that they did in years past. Some people (46% of unchurched people, according to a survey by Barna); do not even know that Easter has anything to do with the resurrection of Jesus. They may come to your church for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with spiritual seeking. They may want to spend time with family or hear the music or take their kids to the special programs.

They may hear that Jesus rose from the dead for the first time—and like any new message, they will most likely initially reject it. Make that OK. Acknowledge that people visiting the church may have questions about the message, invite them to question, dialog and explore. Make their Easter visit the start of a conversation.

For example, have a bulletin insert that invites them to studies that explore the Christian faith, offer websites that answer questions, do whatever you can to encourage them to continue their explorations. On my website <http://www.effectivechurch.com> I have some bulletin inserts you can download and that do this. Or you can create our own with this message:

Bulletin inserts to give out at the Easter Service

Still have questions?

Many people do.

You've just heard the story of Jesus rising from the dead, but after you leave the church, when brunch is over and you've had your fill of chocolate, you might wonder-is it just a story?

Or did it really happen?

If it did, what does it mean to me?

If you've got those questions, we've got options for you.

On the back of this sheet we hope you'll check out the websites and events we've got to help you in your research.

Take all the time you want.

The issues are worth it.

On the back of a handout like this you could then list some upcoming Bible studies that overview or explore the Christian faith or discussions, some websites to explore, some books they might want to read. Be sure also to

include emails or phone numbers of individuals who would be willing to interact with people who have questions about the Christian faith and who are able to lead a person to Jesus.

Don't forget the obvious—Easter gospel tracts

Some people might come to your church Easter week, knowing quite a bit about Jesus and the gospel message, but it has not all come together for them on how they need to respond. Sometimes a clear, gospel tract or pamphlet that explains what it means to be a Christ follower and how to become one will make an eternal difference for them.

Check with your denomination for a tract that is appropriate to your church or look at the ones available through the American Tract Society—theirs are appropriate for any church. Their website is <http://www.ATstracts.org>. They have tracts, activity packages for children, and all sorts of resources for year round that clearly explain the Christian message.

Communications to introduce people to your church and the ministries of your church

In most churches Easter Sunday services are held at different times than usual; many of the activities of that day are unique for Easter; some ministries hold extra-special events, some ministries don't meet at all.

Without thinking it through consciously at all, churches will often assume that just because visitors enjoyed bringing their kids to the petting zoo the church held at Easter and that the kids enjoyed the chocolate goodies from the Easter egg hunt that they will bring their kids back to Sunday school the next week.

A bit of disappointment often takes place when this doesn't happen. But church members must realize that if you don't specifically tell people (usually with a piece of printed communications) what you do on a regular basis on Sunday, they may not even know what Sunday School is and that it is something that is available for their kids.

Not only for the children's ministry, but for all the ministries in the church and for your church overall, you must be intentional about telling people what you do on a regular basis and invite them to participate. Following are some specifics on how to do this:

Invite them to your upcoming Sunday morning preaching series

Many churches have extra services and times for their Easter Sunday service that are different than what they do on a regular basis. Be sure to include a bulletin insert made up like an invitation that says something like the material below to let them know the regular times of your services and your upcoming sermon series:

We are so glad you took time to attend our Easter Celebration Service.!

We'd like to invite you back to church next week when we resume our regular weekly Celebration Schedule. Our regular service times are: Sundays, 9:30 am; 11 am, and Saturday 6:30pm.

Use your Easter service as a lead-in to a continuing series of upcoming sermons.

You've just preached about the resurrection of Jesus and after Easter is a great time to answer people's questions about some of the most important issues of life and death. Tell them about the upcoming topics in your Easter bulletin and invite them to return, for example:

Our upcoming sermon series is:

Week one: What does Jesus resurrection mean to me?

Week two: Will we recognize our loved ones after death?

Week three: Will people be bored in heaven?

Week four: Can people get kicked out of heaven?

For the ladies who visited your church for Easter, why not give out a great recipe and on the back an invitation to your women's ministry events?

An example of a set of them is at: <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/2010/12/cheese-ball-recipe-cards-great-follow-up-and-outreach-tools/>

For the children, you need a special insert or handout that says something like:

We hope your children enjoyed our special Easter Events for Kids!

This is just a little sample of the wonderful things our church does for children on a weekly basis. We'd like to invite you back next week at 9:30-10:30 am for our Children's Hour. At that time we have classes for all ages with our carefully screened and trained children's teachers.

Your children will hear a Bible story, play games, make a little craft and have a snack. It will be a fun, safe, learning time for them. You can visit our adult church service while they are there and they won't be released until you return to pick them up from their class.

We'd love to have your children come next Sunday or any Sunday- for more information, please call Miss Betty at 555-5555, or check out the children's ministry section on our web site at www.childrensample.com.

Invite visitors them to ministries that you didn't hold on Easter

Do you have an adult education program? Small groups? A Single Adult Ministry?

The schedule at most churches is very different on Easter and you may have a

visitor who is looking for more than a Sunday morning service, for example, for something for Singles or kids or men, but they have no idea that you offer these things on a regular basis. Or this might be their first exposure to church and they have no idea what other things churches do.

It's a good idea to give out to every visitor a brochure or booklet that outlines all the ministries of your church along with contact information on your website, email and phone numbers. If you don't have time to put together something that extensive, at least have announcements like this in your Sunday morning bulletin:

Notice for a Single Adult's Ministry

Attention Single Adults!

First Church of Everytown has a place for you! Our OASIS Single Adult Ministry is open to any single adult. We meet every Sunday morning from 11 am to 12 pm at the Fellowship Hall (that's the big room that looks like a gym that you went by on your way to the worship service).

We've got great coffee and munchies; we listen to a challenging talk from the Bible and then we sit around tables and discuss the topic for about 20 minutes. Afterwards we all go out to lunch together. We've got lots of other events going on during the month that we'd love to tell you about. You can also check out our single's ministry website at <http://www.singleadultschurchstuff.com> (this isn't a real site, just an example).

Child care is available or children are welcome to join us at all our events.

We'd love to have you join us any Sunday or any time. For more information please call Pastor Paul at 555-5555.

Creating invitations and material like this is a lot of extra work at this extra busy time, but it is vitally important if you want the efforts you have expended at Easter to be a time for continuing attendance and growth in your church.

Communications for Seasonal or Special Events Follow-up: postcards, email messages for coffee & conversation, latte with the pastor or how not to go AWOL in your service for the Lord

Many people will visit your church for Easter and in you've been encouraged to strategically communicate with them. Your strategy includes knowing that attendance at special events is not an end in itself, but the start of a relationship with your church and Jesus. To start the connection with visitors, you were

encouraged to create connection cards so that you'll get the information you need to follow-up. To use that information most effectively, you need to start now on your Easter Follow-up Strategy. Here are some ideas:

Decide now on follow-up interaction

After Easter there are a number of things you can do, but one of the best is to simply invite people to interact with you. An invitation to "Latte with the Pastor" a time for "Coffee and Conversation" either at a local coffee shop, a church member's home, or the church, if you have a casual setting or room will be a great opportunity.

The Latte with the Pastor idea came from a church that sent out coupons for a free latte to guests and told them that they could use them whenever they wanted, but that the pastor would be at the local coffee shop from 3-5 on certain days of the week. People were invited to come down, have latte with the Pastor, and ask any question they wanted about the Christian faith.

Pray for the chance to interact with people, to answer questions, to perhaps invite them to other activities such as a Seeker Bible Study or Small Group where they can explore questions about the Christian faith.

You might also do a series of podcasts, videos, blogs or tweets about the basics of the Christian faith.

Best of all would be a combination of print and web-based activities, as many as you and your congregation can do. You'll have the largest pool of potential members right after Easter, you must make the most of it if you want to be faithful as a church and make permanent connections with the people who visited.

Do not take the week off or slow down after Easter.

If you do you will be going AWOL. AWOL means "absent without leave." It's a military term and applies to soldiers who run away from battle or a guard post or ones who because of fear or hardship do not do their duty. At various times in the history of the military it was punished in various ways including wearing a sign announcing that the person was a deserter to the death penalty. Currently, the most frequent punishment is: "bad conduct or dishonorable discharge."

Being tired or afraid is not an excuse for a soldier to go AWOL and it isn't an excuse for a soldier of Jesus. Of course you will be tired after Easter. If you are putting your heart and soul into your ministry, you will often be tired. But the Bible clearly tells us that we are involved in spiritual warfare for the souls of the people our church is attempting to reach. If you have worked for months to get many people to come to your Easter services, if you have created communications to connect with them during the service, don't run away from duty now.

Immediately after Easter, contact visitors

You can do this through email or postcards—the best of course would be to use

both systems, but not every church has the time or budget to do that.

Have these materials prepared ahead of time if possible so they can go out immediately.

Ideas for email or your website:

- Do simple emails thanking people for coming and inviting them back to church next week. Remember to give simple, specific details to remind them about what your church does on a regular basis and where to find out more.
- Do a video interview with your pastor about questions people have after Easter and give answers.
- Do “man on the street” video questions (real ones) and have your pastor or a teacher at the church answer.
- Do podcasts of the above videos.
- If you don’t have the time, equipment or expertise to do these, find similar ones on the web and link to them. <http://www.leestrobels.com/> is one site that has lots of videos that explain the Christian faith.
- Provide links that your pastor and church leaders use to answer faith questions.

Print strategy

Simple cards printed as invitations to any of the events you choose work well. At the link here are some templates and postcards that invite people to interaction with your church.

<http://www.effectivechurch.com/2011/04/easter-follow-up-postcards-email-messages-and-latte-with-the-pastor/>

Whatever method you choose to follow-up at Easter, pray for strength and do it. I know you will be tired, we all will be. At this time and many others I always remember what Ann Ortland said one morning many years ago at a conference devotion time for Christian writers, “much of the significant work for the Kingdom of God is done by very tired people.”

Be tired, but don’t quit. Don’t go AWOL—remain at your post—do your duty for your risen Lord and coming King.

What can happen if you if you work so hard on your event, but don’t have time to work on event communications

This is a true story. Though the specific event discussed is Easter, the lessons learned from it can apply to any event. In addition to applying to any event, we

can all identify with the situation here. The challenges of ministry are so huge, it is very easy to get overwhelmed in one area and totally forget another one. May the Lord have mercy and help us all.

In one of my seminars, at the break, a lady literally came running up the aisle to talk to me.

“Oh, thank you, thank you,” she said, “Now I understand what went wrong.”

I had just been discussing the same ideas I’ve presented here about the importance of an overall communication plan for maximum results from your holiday outreach. I knew it was useful, but her response was more excited than most so I asked her to tell me more about her experience.

She then told me about a special Easter service her church put on that was a huge amount of work and an equally huge disappointment in results. They were a new church plant and wanted to reach out to their community at Easter.

They were meeting in the grade school, but they wanted to grow and to do that committed to reach their community for Jesus this Easter. On faith, they rented the high school gym so they would have room for a huge crowd. They prayed hard and worked hard to get lots of community involvement.

They got it—merchants put up posters; they got lots of media exposure. The day came and the church of 300 had over 1500 at the Easter service held at the local high school gym.

They were so excited. The next week back at the grade school, they set up hundreds more chairs, printed lots of extra bulletins. They were excited to see what would happen.

They didn’t need to go to the extra trouble.

Almost none of the 1500 showed up. The lady who shared this was now between laughing and crying as she continued, “Now I understand what happened!” she said. She was the pastor’s wife and they had been beating themselves up emotionally for whatever had happened to give them so little lasting response. They didn’t know if people really didn’t like them or maybe it was a huge Satanic attack....they didn’t know what to think.

“We didn’t give them any follow up material! We didn’t give them ANYTHING that told them where we met regularly!”

She realized that a simple flyer or a business card that said something like “We are so glad you joined us today! Come back next week to our usual location...” and the card could go on with the church address, phone, map, times of service, some of the services offered would have made all the difference.

“Can you imagine how many people were probably wandering around the parking lot of the high school the next Sunday wondering what happened to the church? And we were miles away wondering where all the people were.”

Though her story was more dramatic than most, I almost never see the necessary follow-up publications given out at seeker events. Because of that lack of

follow-up, few seasonal or special event celebrations accomplish lasting results

The reason this happens is often that the church staff is usually so time-stressed and exhausted just getting the event put on that they don't have time to plan and reproduce the essential follow up documents that are essential to make the event have a lasting impact. It seems like these don't have to be done so they aren't done.

A way to solve this problem and make your event one of lasting success

Prepare your follow up publications and the materials that you will give out to people at the event BEFORE you start to advertise the event.

That seems counter-intuitive and you'll always have an excuse not to do it, **but the purpose of outreach events is not to get people to the event only**. It is to get them involved in the church and introduced to Jesus.

The communications that will do that are of vital importance and easy to not do once the staff is involved in the last-minute preparations for the actual event. If your event does not give your church the lasting results it should, go back over your communications and evaluate what you can do next time to be sure people make the needed connections with your church.

Is having fun what defines a Christian? Is fun why we do what we do for our church seasonal celebrations?

When you look at many current church communications, you'd assume the answer was "yes." A recent scanning of material on the web as I was researching alternative Halloween events overwhelmingly advertised events or promoted activities where the FUN promised is promoted as the primary reason people should attend. Though the illustration following is on the combination of Halloween communications and the emphasis of FUN (intentional shouting with the all capital letters), the same concerns and cautions apply to our communication of all our church seasonal and outreach events.

Please don't think that I'm saying you shouldn't have fun at your seasonal events—but if you don't have motivation bigger than fun, you won't have the spiritual strength to do all you need to do to make your seasonal or outreach celebrations effective times to grow the church.

How fun becomes the primary motivation for Halloween alternative events

Much of the thinking process behind many of these "Christian" alternatives to

Halloween on the web seems to go something like this:

1. Halloween is evil.
2. To take part in a traditional secular celebration of Halloween is evil and sinful.
3. Christians shouldn't do evil and sin.
4. Instead Christians should have good, clean fun.
5. herefore our church will do a fun event for Halloween.
6. People will see we are Christians by our fun.

I don't have a problem with the list up to #3—much of traditional Halloween celebrations are evil. Maybe not as evil as some timid folks fear, but probably not activities that would fall into the class of edifying Christian activities. Dressing up as demons and witches and glorifying magic is not what Christians ought to be doing. Sending your kids out alone to beg for candy in most areas today isn't safe. But the alternative to fighting evil or working to fulfill the Great Commission is not to simply have safe fun.

Why is fun any better than evil on Halloween if you end up at the same place?

Consider this: three people celebrate Halloween in the following ways:

Person #1 casts spells, engages in perverted sexual orgies, mocks the cross, and sacrifices their neighbor's pet dog to Satan.

Person #2 dresses up as a witch, plays with an Ouija board just this one night of the year, and lets her kids go trick or treating alone and eat their candy stash when they want.

Person #3 dresses up in a Bible character costume and every year takes their kids (also properly dressed) to the Trunk or Treat at the local church and leaves with bags of candy, carefully monitored in their consumption. They had FUN. Person #3 and her kids attend the church for other fun events, but have never actually gone to a worship service or Sunday school class, nor have they been visited or called on by anyone from the church. The church doesn't ask for information and considers giving aggressively evangelistic or even strongly worded church invitations to the Trunk or Treat visitors or ones at any FUN church event, too pushy.

At the end of their lives, all other things being equal, when all three people stand before God, if none of them has come to know Jesus as their personal Forgiver and Leader, do you think it matters one bit how they spent their Halloween?

Please don't get distracted here on the theology of degrees of rewards or punishment, we're talking about the big picture here: eternal separation from God or eternal salvation and life. Whether you sinned or had fun on the night of Halloween is not the determining issue.

Don't lose sight of why you are a church

Does your church exist only to give the neighbor kids a good time? If you don't intentionally work to move them at least a step in the direction of eternal salvation at your fun community event, why are you doing what you are doing? If year after year the same people show up for the fun times and you never tell them anything about Jesus or that they need to make a decision about him, what makes you different from the mall when it has an alternative Halloween event?

I heard a new preacher on our local Christian radio station recently who started out by saying he was preaching in part, "to warn people of the wrath to come." Unfortunately I was called away before I could listen to his whole message, but what I heard was no ranting fire and brimstone, but a clear discussion of the reality that all of our lives are moving toward a one-on-one meeting with our God. Your church is, in part, responsible for how the people who have passed through your church fare on that day. Have you done or are you doing anything that makes a difference in their fate when they met God?

Eternal salvation joyous life or eternal, conscious suffering and regret—the choice depends on what people do with Jesus.

The Christian church exists to make that message clear and to present people with that choice. The church does not exist as the greatest place to have fun and when a church primarily communicates that FUN is the reason for an event and that the church is primarily concerned that people have fun and don't sin they are greatly confusing eternal issues. Just before Jesus left the earth, he told his followers they were to be witnesses to that choice.

Maybe we focus on fun because we don't understand what it really means to be a witness.

It isn't TV—you never get off this witness stand

The idea of being a witness has a rather unfortunate connotation in our world today when we think about being a "witness" as Jesus commanded us in Acts 1:8:

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

When we hear the word "witness" we think of a witness in a TV courtroom drama, who comes up on the stand, says something and then leaves. We think of the person being a witness only for a brief time, when they give "testimony."

That is far from what Jesus or the early church meant when they used the term. What we translate "witness" is the Greek word, ***martys***, where we get our word "martyr." It helps to understand the term when we look at it in Hebrews 12:1 "(a cloud) of witnesses," (Vines commentary goes on to refer to the witnesses) here of those mentioned in chapter 11, those whose lives and actions testified to the worth and effect of faith."

To be a witness meant to live one's entire LIFE as a witness of who Jesus is and of the reality that you were going to live forever with Him. It is because they lived and witnessed in that way that the early martyrs died for their faith. They did not become a martyr when they died. They lived as a ***martys*** (a witness) and because in everything they did they witnessed that Jesus was Lord and Caesar was not, they paid for that witness with their death.

How this all gets back to Halloween and having fun

The challenge for the church is to regain its distinct voice and message and to proclaim it always and in every way. Holidays are key times to proclaim our message and natural times to reach out to the community and as Christians, our outreach is incomplete without proclamation. There are many ways to do and on my how-to website (<http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/category/seasonal/halloween/>) I have lots of them, but a few ideas here will show you how easy it is incorporated some challenging thoughts into Halloween outreach.

Following is the text from a business card size give-away that you could create to either invite people to a church event or to simply pass out at this time of year. On the back of the card you could personalize it with your church event AND most important of all give them a website link to a good evangelism site or the place on your church website where it tells you what it means to become and live as a Christian. Below is the text for both the front and back sides, on the website link above is a ready-to-print PDF and template for the card.

Halloween outreach invitation card front text

Halloween, a fun time for tombstones, ghosts, and all things scary. .

..

But what about when it isn't Halloween?

This Halloween, take some time to check out the one person in all of history who conquered death—Jesus.

On the back of this card are resources for you to explore. Halloween can be fun, but it's also time to consider eternally serious and truly scary questions.

Here is the text on the back side of the card:

Life is short; eternity is not. You owe it to yourself to carefully research what happens after you die. The resources below are not mindless quick-skim sites.

They contain well-researched information about Jesus and the truth about life after death. Take time, explore, question, and make an informed decision.

<http://www.leestobel.com>, also books: Case For Faith; Case for Real Jesus

<http://www.equip.org> –in the search box enter in “resurrection”

also book: *The Third Day*

<http://www.whoisjesusreally.com>

<http://www.garyharbermas.com>

Some folks might consider it a bit of a smack in the face to give a friend something like this when all they want to do on Halloween is have a good time and maybe get sick on candy. Some people might even be offended. But some people, even if they get mad initially might:

- Get good and scared and determine to find out more.
- Think about what it says and check out the websites.
- Ask you some more questions.
- Realize you are a friend who cares more about their eternal destiny than just having fun.
- Decide to check out your church because you do offer something more than fun times on holidays.
- Be touched in their heart, look at the websites and meet Jesus.

Make the most of every opportunity

It is so much easier to go the fun-only route. First of all it is, let’s face it—more fun. You also don’t have to deal with rejection, spiritual warfare, and agonizing in prayer that people will respond.

But like the Apostle Paul we must take every opportunity to share the good news about Jesus. Those who face death without him will not meet a party-animal devil, but true horror, unimaginable and endless. That does not have to happen—you have good news—use Halloween and every opportunity to share it.

Lots of work, but essential to the success of your event

All of the suggestions above might seem like an excessive amount of work when all you want to do is put on a successful Christmas party, Halloween Trunk or Treat, an Easter egg hunt or other holiday celebration and then go away and sleep for a week. But this foundational work is vital for your seasonal or special event to be truly successful in ways that are eternally significant.

Remember you aren’t doing all the work for your event simply to get a great turn out or for people to say at the end of it, “a good time was had by all.” Though we do want to get a great turn out and we do want people to have a good time—our ultimate goal that we must never lose sight of is that we want people to connect with our church, to come to know our Savior, and grow in Him. To do the work required is demanding, but as this verse reminds us:

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

Look inward before you reach outward: make sure your church is ready for holiday and special event outreach guests

Around my home and for most people I know, one thing that always accompanies the holidays or any time guests are coming is a flurry of activity—cleaning, putting up decorations, making certain the bathrooms have nice soap and towels, flowers in the guest-room perhaps, and in special cases repainting and major household repairs. With actions big or little, we all do what we can to make guests feel welcome and the holidays special.

This is not only important for our homes when we are expecting visitors, but even more so for our churches. Not only are a check-up and perhaps some improvements important for the sake of a successful event, but if we want to make guests feel comfortable and come back, must make certain our church is ready for them. This is especially important when you follow the guidelines from Effective Church Communications on Seasonal and Special Event Outreach that show you how to get people to come back to your church after special and seasonal events. This video will give you a brief overview of this important process: <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/2009/04/how-to-get-people-to-come-back-to-church-after-special-events/>

Following are some areas that are important for you to check out and perhaps do a bit of renovation on before you invite your guests for holidays and special events so you'll not only be ready for the event itself, but for the growth in your church after it.

The physical plant of the church

The peeling paint in the bathroom, the junk stacked in the corner from a special event that has no permanent storage, the lack of handrails or handi-capped access, the plants that need trimming—there are many things that we no longer see, because we see them every week, that are ugly eyesores to guests.

Take a clipboard in hand (or iPad these days) and go around the church asking the Lord to enable you to see the church as a visitor would see it. Note what needs to be done and schedule a “Welcome Home for the Holidays” workday at the church to tackle these tasks.

Signage check

Ask an unchurched friend (pay them if possible) to come to your church and without any verbal assistance find:

1. The children's ministry
2. The nursery, a place to change diapers

3. The worship center
4. The bathrooms
5. The bathroom with handicapped access
6. Where to get coffee
7. Adult Education classes
8. A place to have questions answered

If they can't find them quickly and easily (and don't feel bad, most churches are challenged in this area) you need to work on your signage.

The best place to look at examples of good signage is your local hospital. Go on a field trip to check one out. In most, even as you drive up, you can see where the emergency room is, where visitor parking is located, what is the entrance for out-patients. Once inside you see directional signs to the various departments and every time you come to a fork in the hallway, there is clear signage telling you what is the next direction to go in.

In additions for directions on how to get places, be certain your rooms have labels outside them. It doesn't help at all if you were clear in your outreach mailing that a Crafts for Moms Free Morning was in your Fireplace Room, if a visitor has no idea where the Fireplace Room is or even that the Fireplace Room is the room behind a certain door. Remember you are doing outreach to people unfamiliar with the church—be very careful you give them clear directions how to get to where you want them to go and kindly let them know they got there when they get there.

Is there room at your church for newcomers?

Once people can find their way around and the Greeters welcome them into the main service, you also want visitors to come back next week you want them to try other ministries at the church, especially if growing a particular ministry at your church was the primary reason for your outreach. For example, it doesn't do any good to have a great community event that reaches out to children, such as a Trunk or Treat or Children's Christmas Party if you don't have an adequate children's ministry at your church that is ready and excited about welcoming new members.

It is futile for church growth to hold an extravagant Holiday Celebration for Single Adults in the community if you don't have a vibrant Single Adult Ministry for them to join after the party.

But oh, the fantastic ministry joy if these areas of ministry are in place and your holiday outreach is a way to welcome in new people.

Not only for these specialized ministries, but for all the ministries at your church, for major holidays such as Christmas or Easter, it does little to work hard on your holiday celebrations and communications as if your church isn't ready for the new people.

This is especially important for anything involving children. If you do a holiday outreach, get lots of people, are diligent about information you give out at the event about your church's ministry to children, and consistent in follow up invitations, you will get new families and children to your church. In preparation for that, be sure you have:

- A clear welcome and information area for Children's Ministries staffed at least a half an hour before and through the entire time the church is in session—newcomers may not know or forget the church schedule and wander in any time.
- Plenty of room and supplies in the nursery, including extra cribs and diapers. Your event most likely wasn't for babies, but younger children often have younger siblings. Be sure everyone in the family is welcome.
- Be certain all the children's classes or programs extra helpers on hand. Depending on the size of the church outreach, you may need to recruit new teachers. Plan ahead for the required training and background checks needed.
- Some kind of informational material to give new parents about check-in, paging at church if you have a system for that, what you will be teaching, etc. If you have handouts that provide parenting advice or tips, you might consider a "New Parent's Information Packet."
- Just like before a new child is brought into a family, for a few weeks ahead prepare the children in your church for newcomers. Pray together for new children to come to your outreach event; equip your children with invitations to give to their friends, encourage the children to be welcome new people at the event and at church; tell them what is expected of them as little ambassadors of Jesus; reinforce welcoming behaviors.

A recommended resource for this area is Church Volunteer Central by Group Resources.

Below is the link to it—it is a wonderful resource, low cost and a source of a huge amount of materials that will help get your church in shape for the holidays. Following it is a blog entry that is one of the best summaries of how to work with volunteers that I've ever seen:

<http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com/>

<http://holysoup.com/2011/09/21/why-they-resist-volunteering/>

In addition to the children's ministries, make certain every ministry in your church expects, looks for and is welcoming to new members.

Keep in mind that if you worked hard to get totally unchurched people to come to your event and if they come back to your regular church services or ministries they probably have no idea why your church does what it does. Be kind, explain, welcome. Invite them for coffee or brunch after church. Follow up with a phone call or additional invitations. Nothing is worse than for a visitor to come to your church after a seasonal event and to walk away mumbling that "this place is for insiders only."

If you have materials for newcomers or follow-up events already in place visitors will feel welcomed and comfortable and more open to getting to know Jesus as well as becoming involved with your church. Nothing is more wonderful than for a visitor to say, “I felt like I came home, found a family I never knew I had, and a Savior who loves me.”

How to revitalize your volunteers before seasonal or special event outreach

We’ve all been there—to an event, perhaps at church, perhaps not, but one that had incredible food, fabulous decorations, and great music—but it was one that we left early because of the people. Maybe they were rude, or ignored us, or simply didn’t seem to care about anybody new so we wandered around quietly munching until we slid out the door.

No matter what else is going on, people are the most important part of any successful event. We need remind ourselves of that reality as we prepare for our seasonal and special event outreach at our church. We can, and I hope your churches does all you can to make your facilities and programs the best they can be prior to outreach events, but if you don’t take time to make sure your people are in top shape in training and attitude before special events, all your hard work on the externals will mean little.

Sometimes the people part is the hardest part

To be honest, sometimes we don’t even want to think about all we have to do to prepare our church volunteers for seasonal or special events. Decorations, PR, food—though challenging, these areas can be managed. But the people? That’s often the hard part—they turn us down; they are cranky; they want to do things their way; they are demanding; some don’t show up when we are counting on them—the reasons go on and on for why we’d rather just do it all ourselves. When those thoughts cross your mind, we do well to remember our responsibilities from the Lord. We aren’t called to do it all ourselves, but as Eph. 4:11-16, NLT reminds us:

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love,

growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

This passage reminds us:

1. Those of us who are leaders (this means pastors, church secretaries, church communicators—everyone involved in the leadership of events) are God’s gift to the church, leadership is not a gift for us to hoard and practice alone.
2. Our gifting comes with responsibility—to equip God’s people to do his work.
3. Our church grows as we practice this equipping and all of us become more like Christ in the process.

Bottom line: equipping church members isn’t optional as we plan our events—it is our Lord’s prescribed way of doing things. When that truth sinks in, it will give us the strength we need because working with church members and volunteers NEVER makes the job easier. To think that it will is the source of disappointment for many. The reality is very different.

As someone said long ago (I don’t know who, so please forgive me and let me know if you know the source): “They don’t call it teamFUN, its teamWORK, because it is always harder to work with people than it is to do it ourselves. We don’t work in teams because it is fun or easy, but because that is what the Lord commands and how we all grow through this process.”

You don’t have to do this alone—resources and advice

Below are three resources that will help you revitalize your church members and volunteers prior to special events. Following these resources are a few informal comments on a practical application of how to involve people.

#1 CASE STUDY: To help you be more successful in recruiting volunteers for special events

<http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/2010/09/a-case-study-to-help-you-be-more-successful-in-recruiting-volunteers-example-a-church-trunk-or-treat/>

The link above will take you to a video that illustrates explains the reasons why we often don’t get the volunteers we need for church outreach event and what to do to change that. It does not dwell on the problems, but provides detailed instructions on how to create a brochure that clearly explains expectations, job descriptions, spiritual motivation, and how to be involved. Along with the video is an ebook that shows what the video describes in detail. It is a step-by-step PDF that is easy to follow. PLEASE take time to view this as a staff—it could have a powerful effect on the success of your volunteer recruitment in the future.

#2 Create a continuing church culture to recruit and train volunteers

We all know that doing things at the last minute, in panic mode, is not the best way to get anything done if we want a project to have long-lasting impact. This reality is especially true when it comes to church volunteers. People grabbed at the last minute and shoe-horned into a job without training are seldom successful in making guests feel welcome at the church or are they likely to want to continue in an often uncomfortable situation

Volunteer programs are most successful if they are a continuing part of the church. If the church is continuously recruiting, training, appreciating and valuing volunteers, recruiting and training some for special events won't be traumatic.

A recommended resource for this area is **Church Volunteer Central by Group Resources**. Below is the link to it—it is a wonderful resource, low cost, and a source of a huge amount of materials that will help get your church in shape for the holidays. Following the link to the overall group is a blog entry that is one of the best summaries of how to work with volunteers that I've ever seen:

<http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com/>

<http://holysoup.com/2011/09/21/why-they-resist-volunteering/>

#3 Provide training for your first-line volunteers—your Greeters

If the first person a visitor encounters on a return to your church is cranky and not helpful, chances are the visitor will not return. You must make certain your first-line-troops are in the best possible shape for their vital role. Time spent training them and going over what can make them most effective is essential. Fortunately, you don't have to figure this out yourself.

Chris Walker at <http://www.evangelismcoach.org/> has done an incredible job of putting together not only training for Greeters, but quite a bit of information on practical evangelism. Everything on this site is useful. Chris' books, videos, articles, training—if you go through his material, your church will be ready for the holidays. Be sure to give yourself enough time to take advantage of this training.

Final advice on recruiting volunteers—one of your most important tools is a person who loves Jesus and people

I've seen first-hand what effective volunteer recruitment can do for people who are new to the church and unconnected. I've seen them get excited, motivated and feel like they are an important part of an event. I've seen the smiles and heard the comments about how much fun it was to be part of something they'd never done before and most important, I've seen them start a relationship with Jesus from helping out at a church event. To make that happen, though all of the advice above is useful and practical, I know from years of experience that few things are more successful in volunteer recruitment and involvement than someone who loves Jesus and people.

I've seen the reality of the statements above in my husband, a bi-vocational pastor. Whenever any church we have worked with wants to make an event successful they put him in charge of volunteer recruitment. All 6' 3" and over 225 lbs. of him flies into action—getting people excited, telling them he needs their help, making the uninvolved feel essential.

He'll pair up people brand-new at the church and old-timers at the church, kids and seniors; he'll call people, talk to people before and after church.

He'll tell some of the guys he works with through his handyman business (the bi-vocational part of our life that supports our ministry habits) that he absolutely needs them and some come onto church grounds for the first time in years because of his invitation to help grill burgers.

He'll have lists and directions, but most of all he communicates to people that what they are asked to do is the most important and exciting, life-changing event they can be involved in. At the event itself, he is a blur of motion—building up, laughing, encouraging, moving a person here or there if needed—hugs, thanks, and enthusiasm flow unceasingly. After the event, it's often hard to say who got the most from it—our guests or the volunteers.

Though careful planning and checklists are more compatible to my approach to life and ministry, I've learned that there is something to be said for just turning folks loose in volunteer recruitment and event leadership, if they have the gifts and calling for it. If you aren't quite sure what to do with someone like that—ask the Lord. If he could take a man who had trouble with his mouth, who lopped off an ear of an enemy, ran away when scared, and then turn Simon, the irritating pebble into Peter, the Rock, the fearless leader of that early group of volunteers who made up the church and who went on to change the world, who knows what the Lord might do in your church with that person you can't quite control, but who always seems to get things done?

Jesus didn't need any of us to accomplish the work of salvation, but he chose to work with volunteers to get the job done of evangelizing the world. Make his example your inspiration as you revitalize your volunteers for seasonal and special event outreach.

Financial considerations for seasonal events

When I first published earlier versions of their pieces on the Effective Church Communications website, they generated quite a bit of feedback both pro and con about charging for seasonal events at churches.

Though I totally understand the financial challenges of ministry (my husband and I are both bi-vocational, working at other jobs to support our church ministries), I personally strongly believe that the churches ought not to charge for events. The following is a true story that influenced my decision and is worth considering.

Charging for outreach events, what's wrong with that?

There may be legitimate reasons for charging for some events, for example if you are bringing in a professional Christian comedian or speaker—someone has to pay for their time and expenses. However, in most instances, I believe strongly that it communicates an incorrect message if a church charges (or even asks for donations) at a ministry event. Here are some additional thoughts on this:

Fall Festival mixed message

I recently looked at an advertisement for a Church Fall Festival. It was going to be an alternative Halloween event, something that is always popular with the community. I was told that in years past this church put on the event as a free community outreach, but this year things were different. The person showing me the invitation card was concerned and here's why:

The invitation said:

“Fun, games, food, candy for all!” and in big letter, “No entry fee”

In much smaller letters it said,

“There will be a small charge for food, candy not included.”

and

“There will be a charge for professional photos at the event.”

What's wrong with that?

Times are financially hard for lots of people and it was not only a very confusing message, but I think one unworthy of the gospel. Let's look at the food charge first and then the photography one.

About the food:

It was confusing because it was not clear what is free and what isn't? Does that mean if you are struggling and jobless, your kids can go and get free candy, but sorry, no hot dogs, chips, or drinks for your kids?

How much is a small charge? For people without work or underemployed, what might seem like a “small charge” might mean the equivalent cost of half a week's groceries (you can buy a lot of food at your local 99 cent store for five dollars).

About the photography:

Several years ago, Group Publishing had a fantastic Halloween outreach program where they encouraged churches to take pictures of kids who came to

the alternative Halloween program and then to mail them to the families in a complementary frame after the event. This was a wonderful way to get names and contact information and then to give back to guests. What a wonderful basis for building a relationship with unchurched people!

But this one is totally different. A professional will charge you for photos. That would accomplish NOTHING in terms of outreach and again has the potential of making some little kids feel sad and left out.

Why both are unworthy of the gospel

What really bothers me about both of these items is their obvious disregard for “the least of these.” Whoever wrote or approved these charges is obviously not struggling with not being able to pay for rent or groceries or many things for their kids.

I hate (forgive the strong word, but I think this deserves it) hate, hate it when children come to a church “outreach” event and then some of them cannot have what others have because they can’t afford it.

Maybe a family comes to the event having eaten a really little dinner. Yes, the kids can get candy, but they aren’t allowed the hot dogs, chips and drinks other kids are having. What does a mom say when her child asks, “Mom, why can’t I have a hot dog?”

Maybe a family would really like a picture of their child at Halloween, but again, if you have not done without, you may not realize that you may not be able to afford to take a picture of your children.

That family gets to watch those who have money to get professional pictures taken. A child may not understand the fee system and may make the mistake of asking, “Mommy, I want my picture taken, can I get it?”

What could have been a pleasant night out for the family becomes one more embarrassment because they don’t have money.

What to do about it

For any church holding an outreach event, I would advise:

- If you can’t afford to give things away to everyone, don’t offer them to some.
- If your church can’t afford to do some things and some folks really want to offer them, challenge them to raise the money to pay for it. Though many people struggle today financially, many others are doing just great. It doesn’t cost a whole lot to buy dozens of hot dogs and soda. If you can’t trust God to raise money for that, your church has more problems than a lack of funds for Halloween food.
- If you can’t afford to pay for a “professional” photographer, go with amateur and free. Most people would love something simple, fancy isn’t what’s needed. Memories don’t require professional polish to be meaningful.

WWJD?

What would Jesus do? That saying has of course been overused, but in this situation the answer is quite obvious. At His table, when he was on earth and forever, everyone is invited, everything is free. Jesus truly paid it all.....and the only required response is that we come.

Evaluate the results of your seasonal or special event, or just because a lot of people show up, does that make your church special event successful?

What makes a church outreach, seasonal or special event successful?

- Is it about the number of people who showed up?
- Is it about what a fantastic time they had at the event?
- Is it about how many volunteers you involved and how many stayed around to help clean up?

Though all of these things are important and satisfying when they happen, in our churches we should always look beyond the immediate as we measure success.

As we consider the value of seasonal and special events in our churches, we need to review how we look at how we evaluate success in church events. We need to look beyond initial attendance and evaluate church outreach events for lasting effectiveness, no matter how well it seemed we did at the event itself.

As you'll find, in this article, many of the things we think are successful aren't when looked at in how they impact long-term church growth.

A great turnout doesn't always equal great results

I recently looked at a church website that celebrated the great success of their fall outreach by listing the number of hot dogs served and ice cream bars given away. Though I understand they were celebrating that they got a great turnout for their event, a great turnout alone does not make for a successful church event, especially for this kind of event at this church because it was a neighborhood church many people could walk to.

Even with the most minimal advertising, it would have been difficult not to get a great turnout when they were giving away free food and ice cream. In addition, we need to remember as we evaluate our seasonal events that. . .

To give away goodies is not the purpose of the church

The church exists is to fulfill the Great Commission—to introduce people to Jesus and to help them grow into mature disciples. A fun event and food give-

away might be a great way to start that process, but it won't be any more than a start if you don't spend some time in prayer and careful strategic planning. The rest of the article will help you do that.

Strategy and planning is not the most fun thing to do, but it is the most essential

You are not putting on the seasonal event for the sake of having a fun party and stopping at that. Your goal must be to begin a relationship with people that will grow your church and change lives. You want to represent Jesus so people will come to know him.

To help you plan for events coming up this fall, it can be helpful to look back at events from past years and honestly evaluate them.

Following are some questions you need to discuss in your church staff meetings as you look to the future:

Event evaluation questions

- What made this church event different than the similar events hosted by the local mall or downtown merchants?
- What did people learn about the church from attending the event?
- How many people came back to church the following week because of the event?
- Did the attendees learn anything about Jesus from the event?
- Did the attendees leave with any follow-up information that invited them back to the church or gave them information on how to find out more about the Christian life?

We've got to get honest with ourselves about the results of what we have done if we want to make an impact on our world. If your answers to the previous questions aren't all you want them to be, take some time to think about how you can make your upcoming events produce the results you want.

The book: *Planning, Measuring, Evaluating, done a new way—big is busted, try tiny!* has detailed instructions on how to do event and ministry evaluations, plus reproducible charts you can use. It is available as a download on <http://www.effectivechurch.com/resources/> and in paperback at <http://www.amazon.com>.

If you aren't tracking costs and results, why not?

Even without tracking it, if you know the answer is something along the lines of "We didn't do a very good job of communicating it to people outside the church and we can't honestly point to anyone who is now attending or who has come to know Jesus because of it," you then have two choices:

1. You can learn to communicate more effectively so that your holiday events will yield measurable results in the future.

or

2. Quit spending all that money to entertain yourselves and give it either to a mission group or church that is successful in outreach or give it to feed hungry children.

Tracking our communications and the results of them will keep us honest in church programming and evaluation.

Tracking can keep us from over spiritualizing. What I mean is that it is easy to conclude that people aren't interested in something such as spiritual growth, coming to small groups or a discipleship study for example, when in reality we simply didn't advertise it very well.

Honest evaluation can also keep us from false excuses. You can create many communication pieces today for little or no cost and that will keep you from the current popular excuse for not advertising church events which is that "We just can't afford to advertise church events because of the recession." There is a lot of marketing that doesn't cost much: web-based, email-based advertising, creating websites and blogs with WordPress.com; making sure what you do create has complete details, involving your people instead of buying mailing lists, e.g. equip them with inexpensive postcards to mail to friends—all these ideas can generate lots of church marketing for little or no money.

In print marketing, I'm encouraging churches to look at publication techniques such as digital duplicators which enable you to create communication pieces for a fraction of the cost of color copiers. Or if you want slick, glossy color, look at some of the online deals from companies such as Vista Print. Print is still one of our most powerful communication tools and equipping your people with inexpensive printed invitations can be one of your most powerful tools.

Finally, it's too important not to be honest

The eternal destiny of people is what is at stake as you plan your outreach events. In addition, the temporal growth of your church and all the spiritual and emotional benefits it can provide to the people who become part of it are important considerations.

In addition, putting on special events is a lot of work and usually costs quite a bit of money. If you take the time to carefully plan and commit to honestly measure the results, all the hard work and money will be worth it. It will be worth it because you'll see that your hard work had results: lonely people made friends; newcomers visited your church and found a church home, searching people started on a path to salvation.

If you worked hard to involve your people, some who never thought they could do outreach brought a friend who now knows Jesus, a co-worker became a sister in Christ, a spouse found that the church wasn't the judgmental place he

feared, but a welcoming community. All the people involved learned that they can be a witness and that by working together, every person can help the church grow.

The often forgotten result of a successful seasonal or outreach event: a party in heaven!

If you worked hard to motivate your people to reach out to the unchurched, if you carefully explained and introduced people to your church, if you followed up and helped them meet Jesus—remember that the Bible says the angels rejoice when one person repents (Luke 15:10)—can you imagine what a party there is in heaven over your event when you introduce many to the Savior?

Not only a party in heaven, but practice for heaven

No matter how convinced I hope you are that seasonal and special event celebrations are one of the best possible ways to grow your church in numbers and your people spiritual maturity, they remain a challenge and a tremendous amount of work.

In the midst of that work to encourage yourself and your people, consider C. S. Lewis' words when he said that joy was the business of heaven. You are practicing now—but one day fruits of your labor will result in never-ending celebration. You don't want to stumble into heaven, weary from a self-absorbed life too busy to reach out and share with others. Instead, tirelessly share earthly celebrations with those who don't know Jesus and bring with you a great group of friends to together enter into the joy of your Lord.

About Effective Church Communications

Effective Church Communications is a ministry that provides training, resources, and inspiration to help church communicators

fully fulfill the Great Commission. The hub of our ministry is our website: www.effectivechurchcom.com.

Our approach to church communications includes more than design and communication construction how-tos, though we have lots of them. It includes foundational, biblical teaching related to communications, communication leadership, and church communication teams. We constantly remind church communicators that we have been entrusted with the words of eternal life and the eternal destinies of people depend on how well we communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Though we work hard to stay current with technology (our training is web-based, we tweet, podcast, and are moderate tech junkies), we value and teach timeless communication skills and principles. The majority of our training has application in every communication channel from print to podcasts.

We believe churches of every size, from tiny house churches to mega-churches benefit from clear, effective communication and we strongly emphasize that churches be who they are in their communications to their unique congregation and to the community they are called to reach. We strongly encourage churches to study their people, set goals, evaluate response to communication projects, consistently and clearly communicate, rather than copy the latest mega-church or marketing trend.

We do not allow, encourage, link to, or promote, in any way, irreverent, profane language or snarky, cynical approaches to church communication or in the discussion of it. We serve a holy God and we seek in all we do to walk worthy and communicate a worthy message.

We strongly believe church communicators, from any size church, who use any software, with any skill level, can help and encourage each other and we have a number of ways church communicators can share and interact through our website.

Though we encourage church communicators to pour their hearts, minds and souls into the hard work of communicating the words of eternal life, we are constantly aware that our words will only accomplish eternal results because of the blessing of them, and His working through them, by our eternal God.



About Yvon Prehn

Yvon Prehn is the founder and director of the training site for church communicators, www.effectivechurchcom.com.

Yvon has worked in communication ministry for over 25 years. She was a free-lance newspaper reporter and religion writer for the *Colorado Springs SUN*. She was a top-rated, national trainer in desktop publishing for Padgett/Thompson, the nation's largest one-day seminar company when desktop publishing was first invented. She worked as a communications consultant and trainer for many of the ministries headquartered in Colorado Springs and was senior editor at both Compassion International and Young Life International. For fourteen years she traveled full-time all over North America teaching seminars on church communications.

Yvon has written for many of the major Christian magazines. Her most recent books include: *Church Bulletins, how to create and use them to touch and change lives*, *Church Connection Cards*, *The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications & Marketing*, available at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn.

Yvon has a master's degree in Church History and has done additional extensive graduate work in theology and communications. She has taught high school English and was an adjunct professor in church history at Regis University.

In addition to her formal experience, Yvon gets the opportunity to practice church communications in very practical ways. She is the wife of a bi-vocational pastor and does the secretarial and church communications work for her husband Paul, in addition to co-teaching in a variety of ministry settings at the church they work with in Ventura, California.



Links to additional training materials from Yvon Prehn and Effective Church Communications

Digital versions and downloadable e-books are available from:

Smashwords: <https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/yvonprehn>

This site has lots of free special edition ebooks. It also allows you to download books in any ebook format. New ones are continuously added, so check back frequently. ***Please pass on this link to church, mission, and other groups for the free downloads.***

Yvon's digital books are also available from these major online and retail sources, just put "Yvon Prehn" into their search function to find the books. These selections are added to frequently, so check back for new titles.

www.amazon.com: Kindle versions for download to the Kindle reader available here

Itunes online bookstore

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Yvon Prehn's books in paperback

A growing selection is available at <http://www.amazon.com>. Just enter "Yvon Prehn" in the search box to go to her list of books.

The regular amazon pricing, shipping, free shipping offers apply.

If you would like to purchase books in bulk at a reduced price, or are interested commissioning a Personalized Special Edition for a training event or conference, contact yvon@effectivechurchcom.com.

Yvon Prehn's Church Communication Training CDs

The training CDs are an extraordinary resource for church communicators. They typically contain a selection of training videos, PDF handouts, templates and ebooks on a topic related to church communications. This is a continuously growing collection, so check back often for new titles.

Currently, CDs are only available through the Resource Store section of the Effective Church Communications website:

<http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/resources/>

Additional training

Effective Church Communications Training website: <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>

The Effective Church Communications website has articles, many training videos, ready-to-print templates and PDFs for church communicators. It has hundreds of entries that can do everything from equip a beginning church communicator to challenging a senior staff member to be more effective in their church communications.

To stay connected, get notices of new materials and resources and to be challenged in church communications:

Yvon Prehn's blog: <http://www.churchcommunicationsblog.com>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/yvonprehn>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/EffectiveChurchCommunications>

YouTube videos: <http://www.youtube.com/yvonprehn>

LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/yvonprehn>