

Planning For A Big Day A Short List of Suggestions

1. Start Early! At the beginning of every calendar year pastors can look ahead to predict the most likely high attendance and low attendance days of the year. By planning ahead to accentuate the high days and mitigate the low days the overall average attendance may be increased and more and more people won to faith in Jesus Christ.

Identify the most likely High Days: Easter, Mother's Day, time change day in the fall, and the Sunday before Thanksgiving are all likely to be high attendance days. Other special event days built around VBS Sunday, Back To School Sunday, etc. may be developed.

What are my most likely high attendance days: Look at the attendance records from last year, when does your attendance spike? Why? Take a hard look at your current programming there must be something in your congregational culture that brings these high points.

My most likely high days:

Deal with the most likely Low Days: Time change day in the Spring, Memorial Day Weekend, 4th of July weekend when the 4th falls on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday or Tuesday, Labor Day Weekend, the weekend after Thanksgiving, and the weekend after Christmas Day are all likely to be low attendance days.

Three of these are easiest to deal with by planning for some special added features which may 'raise' the 'low'

1) time change weekend in the Spring when we all 'spring ahead' by adding an hour of daylight and loosing an hour of sleep lends itself to low attendance which might be mitigated by phone tree reminders on Saturday and heavy promotion the week before (at church) and during the week (post cards/newsletters). Use a 'time' theme for the worship service.

2) 4th of July weekend lends itself to a Red White and Blue Celebration. Wear patriotic colors. Use a patriotic theme. Develop Christian and Civic symbols by including a short history lesson on the flag, using the pledges of allegiance (Baptist assemblies should never use the Pledge to the American Flag without also including the Pledge to the Christian Flag), accent the Christian symbols of communion and baptism. Plan a home-made ice cream social for the evening!

3) Labor Day lends itself to a picnic celebration for the evening. Feature Buffalo Burgers grilled by the pastor or some other attention getting menu item. Reserve the local park, set up on the church lawn, or go to someone's home if there is room enough to be outside. Bring your own lawn chair!

2. Add A Special Feature

How many people are usually involved in leading worship on a given Sunday?
Add a special feature by which more people can be involved in meaningful participation and watch the visitors arrive...especially if you use the Children's Choir and they rehearse for a few weeks in advance!

For Easter a wise pastor can plan for a Spring Baptism. Easter celebrates the new life of the risen Christ which is also the Christian symbol of Baptism. The now secular tradition of new clothes for Easter can be traced back to the ancient church when Easter Sunday was Baptism Sunday and each baptismal candidate was given a new white robe!

Make Easter a fabulous family celebration with an Egg Hunt on the church lawn following Morning Worship. The beauty of the modern hen is that by laying plastic eggs you don't have to worry so much about the eggs spoiling by being outdoors for a while. Be sure to plan for 500 or 1,000 or 10,000 eggs. Have the upper elementary grade children distribute them on the church lawn. Let the participating children know how many eggs there are and then divide by the number of children present so that everyone gets the same number of prizes! Use one of the Resurrection Egg Sets from the book store to tell the story of Easter as part of the Worship Service with the children.

Is an added Worship service needed? If Easter already brings me to capacity do I need to double my capacity by adding another service? The church already offering a 10:30 a.m. Morning Worship may be well served to offer a 9 a.m. Easter Worship.

Does Easter allow us to organize some really special music? The Ready To Sing series of cantatas and theme music can be of great help to the volunteer choir.

What special features might we add?

What will I need to do to insure that these special features work well?

Develop specialized promotion? How will everyone know of the special day if you don't tell them? How will they realize what's going on if they only hear it once?

Newspaper ads and yellow pages listings do little to attract the un-churched. Consider a saturation mailing. You can develop your own material but you may want to bring in the professionals for the first time or two. Check out the outreach.com website or thumb through their periodical for suggestions. If you use their services be sure to plan for the cost of both the promotion package and the postage to send the cards. The good folks at Stinson Press can also help you with similar services to blanket your area with special invitations.

Keep in mind, however, that if you invite them you'll want to be able to offer what you've promised. Make it a special day. Clean off the coat rack. Pick up the clutter. Dust the corners. Company's comin'! So make your worship service user friendly keep the prayer list short and focused, eliminate any announcement that does not directly impact at least 1/2 of the people present (remember small group promotion needs to be done in the small group not in the large group setting), start on time, eliminate the dead time in the service, preach a positive message of hope and resurrection!

3. Use the power of focus. Concentrate your effort. If you offer a Sunrise Service will your people really need a Sunset Service? If you make Morning Worship a real extravaganza will you need to follow it with a low key and low attended Sunday evening?

Learn to do a few things and do them well! Focus on a few special days. Focus on one or two styles of worship and master them.

Focus on the family connection. Research continues to show that the most effective network we have to reach people is in the family arena (see Thom Rainer's **Surprising Insights from the Unchurched**). Develop a list of family members who should be part of your church with the rest of their family. Then be sure someone from the family invites them!

Focus on recent visitors. What has happened to those visitor cards? What has already been done with and to the folks who have visited in the last 6 months? Who are they? Where are they attending church now? What do you need to do to get them to attend this Easter? Mother's Day? 4th of July?...now you're getting the picture.

Focus on the larger congregation. If your church has an average attendance of 50 you probably have at least 100 people who are part of your larger congregation. The larger your church becomes the broader is its larger congregation of folks who attend infrequently but who do attend some. Keep a list for 6-12 weeks of all the folks who attend at least one of your services. Focus on increasing the frequency of attendance. If they attend once in 12 weeks work with them until they attend twice. The unchurched population in America who become churched attend church several times in the year before they come to faith in Christ and His Church!

Do I know the full extent of my larger congregation?

How can I know them better?

Would attendance pads passed during the worship service help?

Do I need a crew of volunteers or a paid secretary to help track attendance patterns?

4. Pastors set the pace; but everyone needs to get involved! If you don't invite then your people will not invite. If you don't share your faith then your people won't share their faith. The unchurched who are seeking the church want brief but meaningful contact from the pastor (that's why the Lord gave us cell phones and Sunday afternoon's so we can call/stop by/contact personally the visitors who attended on Sunday morning).

5. Be user friendly! Have some stranger visit your worship service and tell you how friendly the congregation was or wasn't, how easy it was to follow the order of service, how clean the building really was or wasn't, and how easy it was to find places in the building or how hard it was to do so.

Get ready for company. Encourage your people to "Park in the back. Sit in the front. Move to the middle. Speak to those around you."

Need to dialogue about these and other special plans? Call, e-mail, or stop by!

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