“I’ll be at church for Christmas”

The famous old song may be about being home for Christmas, but a lot of people do try church then, and at Easter, and we must make the most of it.

How many times as a pastor have I been driving home from a holiday Sunday or service thinking, “I wish we would have...(whatever),” or “Next year we have got to....”

Well here are some thoughts (with accompanying video) that may be too late for this Christmas, but not for some of the other special days next year. We don’t want you to be driving home with those thoughts of what could have been.

Happy holidays to you and your church!

Knute, for Jeff and Jim
Things to remember for Christmas and Easter people

**Jeff Bogue**

1. It's highly likely that they do not have a relationship with Christ, so it is a great opportunity for evangelism.

2. Treat them more as guests than strays.

3. They have spiritual interest or they would not have bothered to show up. For the most part they are not “hard hearted backsliders,” but rather the disconnected fringe of your ministry efforts.

4. Focus your Christmas and Easter messages on felt needs. Use them as a door to draw people through. Since they are C and E people, they probably know the story of Christmas and Easter, so their struggle with church is that they see it as irrelevant. Use the messages to actually help affect them in their real world.

5. These folks probably think of you as “their pastor,” so welcome them warmly because the opportunity to really influence them might be down the road. No teasing...you very well might wind up doing their weddings and their funerals.

6. Provide an easy path to a deeper tie and make that path highly visible. For instance, launch a series so they want to come back, or start a program the following week (i.e., basketball, a marriage group, or open care groups for grief or divorce).

**Jim Brown**

1. Work extra hard to present the gospel in a compelling way. I am shocked when churches don’t share an evangelistic message when so many people in the room are far from God.
2. Capitalize on the time they are with you by introducing a new sermon series that is coming up that could draw them back.

3. Don’t use insider talk that they would have no clue about.

4. They are your guests, so serve them just like you would if people were guests in your home. Love them and do your very best to show Christ’s love.

5. Many of these people have been burned by the church in the past, so make sure you don’t beat them up and make them feel guilty for only coming once a year. It’s God’s kindness that leads to repentance.

6. Make sure you have proper signage and greeters to help them move through your church.

7. Don’t water down the message. People are hungry for truth and respond to the truth.

8. In your planning ask this question, “How would a lost person answer the question?” We have even reserved an empty chair in meetings to represent the voice of the lost. It’s very easy to forget how a lost person thinks when you have been entrenched in church your whole life.

9. Smile a lot from the stage. Way too many leaders look like they hate what they are doing!

10. Take a few moments to cast some vision about where you are going as a church and why you choose to go that direction.

11. Take time to just say thanks for coming. You would be surprised how this simple gesture makes many feel loved. You can never say thanks enough to people.
1. Our Lord loves these people as much as He loves us, in the sense of wanting what is best for them—so should we. Holidays are a great opportunity to treat them well.

2. Love means being full of care, and not scolding or attacking those who come. Goal is not to give them everything in one service, but to help them want more.

3. What happens at holidays can be very special, but not totally different from right afterwards or they may be disappointed when they return.

4. The cross should be explained.

5. Many who used to go to church say the “believe” (over 80% in some surveys), but they got hurt or hurt themselves. So grace in mood is essential for those who got hurt, and grace in the message for those who hurt themselves.

6. It is good to get names and have a follow-up plan, but also to help the people who invited them know this is their calling.

7. Love and grace are attractive. And the building should be, too.

**Ideas for the holidays**

**Jeff Bogue**

Ideas for teaching series on Christmas:

1. *Waiting on the World to Change*
2. *With Us...*
3. *The Chronicles of Christmas*

**These are series we did at Grace. Contact me and we will get you the material we have.**

Ideas for teaching series on Easter:
1. **For Us**...a follow up series from the **With Us** series we did at Christmas
2. **Stuff Only God Can Do**...a series about the fruits of the Spirit...creative series about life change
3. **Before/After**...a series in which we looked at people who at first disbelieved Jesus, but were totally changed after His resurrection. (Paul, James, etc.)

**These are also series we did at Grace. Contact me and we will get you the material we have.**

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**Jim Brown**

1. “**Dadfest**” on Father’s Day. We go all out to target fathers and men. We spend hours planning a day where men from all walks of life would want to come and participate. Giveaways, early morning motorcycle rides, fun manly competitions, a challenging message for men. We have men drive for miles to be part of this day! We have even been called “the man-church”!

2. “**Momma Mania**” on Mother’s Day. We go all out to reach and honor moms and women on this day. We have given away minivans to single moms, had essay contests, fun mom competitions and a challenging yet encouraging message.

3. Easter is an all-out, full-blown service to reach lost people. We build moments in the service that call for a response. We build memorable moments that the visitors will never forget. We call for a response by having them come forward and sign something, or turn on a switch, cross a bridge. We believe that this moment in their lives should be the most memorable ever.

4. “**Winter Beach Bash**”: This is a holiday we have created in the middle to winter to deal with the realities of depression and cabin fever. We try to lift people’s spirits. Many people deal with winter blues. We create a Beach Bash and an honest heart-to-heart talk about depression. We don’t want our people to believe the lies of the enemy and we want them to be informed about the chemical imbalances our
bodies go through. This has been a fun Sunday in the heart of winter.

**Knute Larson**

1. Music and emotion and stories – they are tied to Christmas and Easter especially. Feature all of them!

2. Sponsor events for particular groups at Christmas especially: a women’s tea party designed for friends to bring friends; a men’s breakfast with a sportsman or athlete; a carol-sing for people to bring friends who love old Christmas songs; a gift party for kids in need (ask the local Children’s services).

3. Have a dessert after the Christmas concerts where people can bring their guests to meet pastoral staff and others. Brief and fun.

4. A noon service (30-40 minutes long) on Good Friday, located near business areas so your people can bring friends from work.

5. If there are popular restaurants with private rooms in business areas, sponsor early morning breakfasts with a known speaker (10-15 minutes) explaining appropriate topics candidly and in plain language: a Christian view of work (Labor Day); the missed meaning of Christmas; the best advice a father (or mother) can get. Obviously these are dependent upon your regulars inviting friends.

6. Think sports, the “language of America” (along with music): a holiday three-on-three basketball tourney at Christmas break; outdoor beach volleyball tourney at Easter break; softball tourney near the Fourth; a 5k or five-mile race on Thanksgiving or Memorial Day.
Outreach ideas connected with the holidays

Jeff Bogue

1. Launch a series that answers a common question or meets a felt need. (*What is the Difference Between Christianity and Islam? How to Affair Proof Your Marriage*, or *Eight Useful Things Jesus Taught* (the Beatitudes)).

2. Facilitate care groups on grief, divorce, or addictions.

3. Focus on a global or urban service opportunity. This deeply affects the younger generations (inner city tutoring, “Feed My Starving Children”).

4. Launch programs for kids (great time to announce new children’s or youth programs).

5. Have a Dad Fest or Mom Fest on Father’s Day or Mother’s Day. (Jim Brown is awesome at this type of outreach...steal his ideas!!)

6. Invite all the relatives of people whose funerals you performed throughout the year to a special memorial service.

7. Have a baby dedication on Mother's Day with a special reception afterwards for the families who dedicated their children.

Jim Brown

1. “Great Christmas Wrap”: We hand out Christmas wrapping paper at all kinds of places all over our community and wish people a Merry Christmas.

2. We hand our thousands of Hershey chocolate bars at Valentine’s Day with a note attached that Jesus loves them. This is a great way to serve the lonely people.
3. We take a Christmas Eve offering at each of our Christmas Eve services and then send people out to give a check on that night to a family that has a specific need. We video tape this and then play back the video at the end of the service so people can see how their giving impacts the people.

4. We march hundreds of people in the local Memorial Day parade and hand out a special gift to every veteran along the path. We march with hundreds of flags, while a specific song of thanks is playing. I have been blown away by how much vets appreciate this event.

5. Halloween: Instead of embracing the worldly perspective we go all out with a weeklong interactive drama called “Judgment House” where thousands of people deal with the realities of life and death. It is by far our largest evangelistic outreach.

6. We regularly embrace the season we find ourselves in by doing many blitzes that are appropriate to the season. The sky is limit: Back to school—backpacks, Labor Day, fall-leaf raking, emergency workers-appreciation baskets, etc. There are hundreds of ideas—just do whatever it takes to show people you love them.

Knute Larson

Particular event ideas show up in my last section, so here are some considerations about outreach and being known for grace:

1. Since it is still true that over 80% of guests come to a church service or event because they are invited by a friend, leaders must plan with that in mind, forming any event designed for outreach with cynics, unbelievers, “dechurched,” and the confidence of our own people in mind.

2. Most churches are near restaurants that are popular, where early morning breakfasts or noon lunches can be an informal
special event or monthly “seeker-oriented” time to explain a Christian truth or life problem. Our “Tabletalk” was downtown, not religious but pointed, and designed for people to bring co-workers.

3. We should regularly remind our faithful people that they are the main inviter of guests, and that the publicity budget is just to give exposure to the church or events, so that their inviting is made easier.

Pastorpedia is produced monthly by three experienced pastors: Jeff Bogue, of Grace Church, in several locations in the Bath-Norton-Medina areas of Ohio; Jim Brown, of Grace Community Church in Goshen, Indiana, a church known for its strong growth, family and men's ministries, and community response teams; and Knute Larson, a coach of pastors, who previously led The Chapel in Akron for 26 years. Pastorpedia is brought to you by CE National. Visit cenational.org/pastorpedia for more issues and to read the bios of our contributors.