

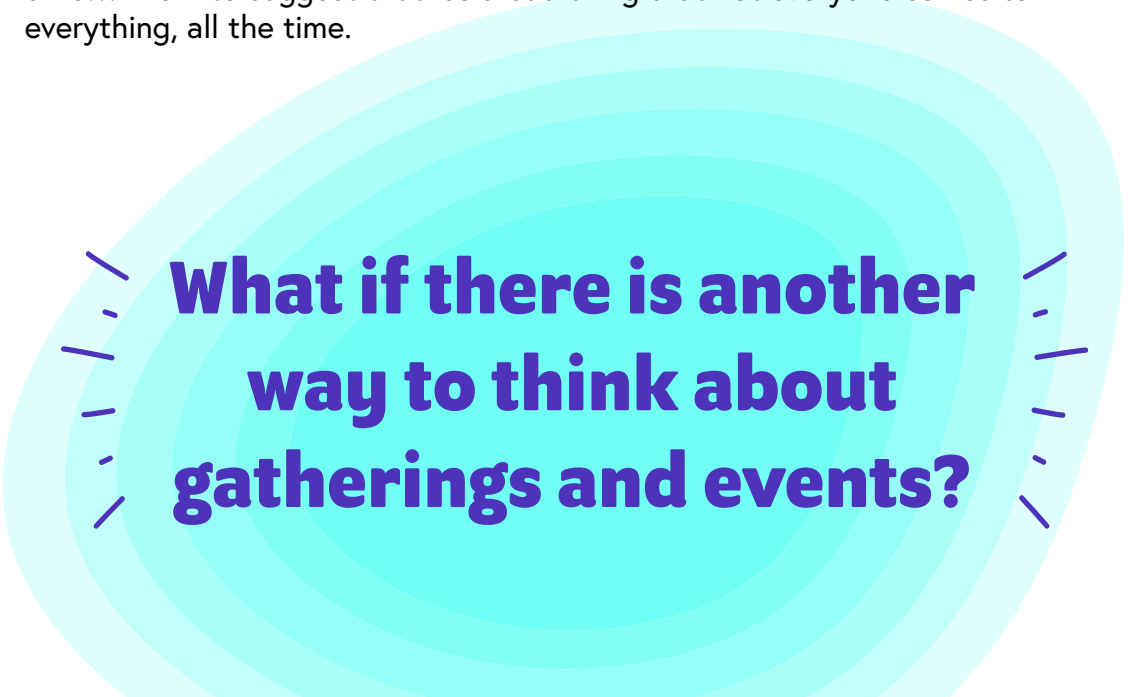
SMALL EVENTS

**BIG
IMPACT**

Grow With Small Gatherings

It's no secret that getting people together has been hard since the beginning of 2020. Maybe it was hard for your church even before then.

Have you ever said, "If only we could get all our people together at one time..." As if to suggest that it's a bad thing that not everyone comes to everything, all the time.



**What if there is another
way to think about
gatherings and events?**

What if there is a way to harness the natural rhythms of the way people live their lives - in subsets and tribes - to build stronger community, momentum, and growth? What if the current limitations that seem like barriers to growth are actually opportunities to make a bigger impact in the everyday lives of your people?

We created this guide to help your ministry create meaningful small events that will sidestep current limitations and propel your church forward into new territory.

Small Is Not the Opposite of Big

The biggest impact you can make through a gathering - a worship service, a class, or an event - is what a person will take away from it. It could be a special memory, an action item they'll actually put into practice, or a concept unlocked that opens new opportunities in their life. You've asked before, "What's the takeaway?"

If the goal of a gathering is to leave your people with a tangible takeaway, **you can often make a bigger impact through a smaller event than a larger one.** The reason for that is the idea of being part of a collective.

When a person attends a large event or worship service, there is certainly an element of awe that leaves an impression. But all too often, that feeling dissipates and the attendee forgets what happened or what was learned.

Participation - a sense of belonging - is much more possible at smaller gatherings where people feel that they experienced the thing with other people. They weren't alone in their experience, which validates it. Someone else was with them. They could see the impact it had on others, thus confirming what God was doing in their own life.

When you gather 20-50 people - as opposed to hundreds - you have a greater likelihood that attendees will feel like participants, rather than onlookers.

When you have more frequent gatherings, of various kinds, you open the doors to more people - even large numbers of people - having a more profound impact based on their participation and shared experiences.

Why not have more frequent small events with bigger impact, essentially multiplying your ability to reach people where they are, in ways that speak to them more clearly?

Planning Your Event

The first thing you've got to do is decide on the types of events you want to host. It could be a winter carnival (can someone say "Cocoa and Caroling"?), a backyard barbecue, a special teaching from a known professional, a service project, or an outing to a local establishment. Get creative. Think about the subsets of people in your church. Consider what your community might want to engage in or what they need. Then, create a calendar of events that will appeal to the wants and needs of those within and outside your church body.

Remember "where two or more are gathered" you have an opportunity for a great small event with big impact! Here's a list of ideas to get you started:

- **Seasonal celebrations**
 - Fall Festival - usually around costumes and candy.
 - Winter or Christmas Carnival - a bonfire and cocoa. Something with snow and sledding. A big hit especially in warmer climates. Truck in the snow.
 - Summer Splash - water slides, water balloons, sprinklers, and water gun fights.
 - Easter Celebration - just sanitize the eggs before placing them.
- **Major life events**
 - Baptisms
 - Weddings
 - Funerals or celebration of life events
- **A creative meal** - crab boil, BBQ, fish fry - just make sure it's hygienic.
- **Clean up a street, sidewalk, or alley.**
- **A day trip to see a local sight.**
- **An organized hike, bike ride, or even a fun run.**
- **A workday around your facility** - keep the tasks fun.
- **A class, seminar, or specific training to add valuable life skills.**
- **Movie night on the lawn.**
- **Snowman building contest.**
- **A \$1 car wash** - You wash their car; then give them a dollar!
- **S'mores and a campfire or cider and donuts**

Come up with several ideas where contact is low and people can connect (at a distance).

An ideal situation would be to offer multiple events with different objectives, reaching different groups of people so that your whole church can feel that you are offering something for them so they can be passionate about participating.

Consider Your Audience

Nobody knows your neighborhood like you. At least, you should. If you haven't already, doing a third-party community demographics analysis is key. It will reveal things about gender, ethnicity, age, income, interests, and other fascinating tidbits about the makeup of the population around your church.

Once you have solid intel about the people in your community, you can ideate events that will actually matter to them. After all, there's no sense in putting tons of effort into an event that nobody wants to attend.

You've got to offer events that interest your audience if you expect them to attend.

Determine Your Needs

Most seasonal events you do - fall festivals, Christmas specials, Easter celebrations, summer parties - will require a lot of the same things. You have people, places, and things. It's a great idea to figure out the exact specifics of what you need, create a list, and crowdsource meeting the needs by having those involved in the planning pitching in to make sure you have everything. After all, nobody wants to come to a trunk-or-treat that runs out of candy or a summer BBQ with only buns and no dogs.

Your church will have some of its own unique touches and swag to personalize the experience. But here's a list of what most events need to be successful:

- A meeting space conducive to what you're trying to accomplish safely.
- Posters with QR codes to promote the event before it happens and to hang at the event to share more about your church or your next event.
- A list of safety procedures to ensure distancing and supplies needed - masks for those who don't have one, hand sanitizing stations, gloves for volunteers handling food, disinfectant for tables and chairs, etc.
- Food (if applicable) and ALL the accompaniments: condiments, plates, napkins, drinks, table cloths, utensils, and so on.
- Furnishings - tables and chairs, mostly.
- The draw - what is the thing that will get people to the event? Bounce house? Snow? Games? A special teaching? What will make your event irresistible?
- A connection point. This could be the connect card, a raffle where you collect information, or a simple sign-up sheet. You need to give people a reason to leave their contact information so you can follow up for more growth.
- A team. NOT just for what needs to be done functionally, but assemble a team to mingle, make connections, and help people take their next step.

Recruit Your Team

For great event production, you need a team with three different segments, also with different talents and responsibilities.

Segment One - The Production Team

The heavy lifters, planners, and detail people make up the production team. This is the team that most leaders think is the only one necessary. Then the event starts, and everyone is scrambling because even though things are in place, they seem sporadic because the other teams were ignored.

For the Production Team, you need a mix of people who are detail-oriented and get-it-done types. You'll need to assign people to:

- Set up and tear down - with enough people to put things away properly.
- Inventory and item management - ensuring you have everything you need.
- Overview planning people - to be positive you have everything covered.
- Food and beverage - if applicable.
- Audio, visual, lights - if desired (music creates a nice ambiance).
- Safety - distancing markers, ensuring setup is optimal, sanitizing stations by high touchpoints, etc.

You might find more needs based on your specific event. Regardless of how you approach it, and even if one person is filling multiple roles, call out the responsibilities so nothing slips through the cracks.

Segment Two - The Communication Team

Someone has to get the word out. Gather people who are active on social media, who are connected to the most people in the church, and who aren't afraid to let their enthusiasm show. The more people you can get to spread the word, the better off you'll be. Have a few key people run point on everything that gets sent out to ensure message fidelity. Prepare some canned messages and invite language so people can more easily share and promote. And encourage your whole church to get involved with inviting their friends and family.

Segment Three - The Connection Team

These are the people at the event who are charged with two main functions: 1) making relational connections, and 2) gathering as much contact information as possible.

The two responsibilities can sometimes be combined but are usually distinct. It's a rare person who can be highly relational and also be aware enough in the moment of conversation to gather information.

You're better off assigning some people to intentional mingling, maybe even set goals and rewards for meeting the most people based on how many people they connect with. The other team might be standing by a raffle stand or sign-up sheet, making no apologies for the fact that they are trying to gather contact information to stay in touch with new friends and to invite people to future activities. After all, nobody really appreciates the bait and switch, so just be upfront about it. We want to get to know you, and we want to get in touch.

Once you've clearly defined the team requirements, it will be easier to recruit people because you can let them know exactly what's expected of them, and you can cast vision around the outcomes you hope to achieve.

Envision Your Collective Outcomes

As a leader and a team, dream a little. Ask what it will look like if this event is a success. Envision how your church or community will be impacted by a successful event. And then try to organize your efforts to fully realize the outcomes you envision. This practice might seem superfluous, but it will help all those who are expending effort to make the event happen know that it's worth the work.

Here's an example of what an envisioning conversation might look like:

"If we host a stellar winter carnival event, we will see new families set foot on our property that have never been here before. We'll make new relationships and help people get on track to pursuing God together at this church. So this event will be a key part in providing life-change in our community."

Let the vision come not only from the main leader but also from the whole team so everyone has ample buy-in.

Communicate Your Outside Objectives

Akin to envisioning your outcomes with your team is sharing your objectives with the public. Let people know what you want for them. Let them know not only what to expect at the event but also what to anticipate as a result.

Here's an example:

"Come for candy, food, and fun. Stay and make some new friends. We hope that your time with us will not only be a great family experience but also that you might just discover something new that God wants to do in your life. This could be the start of a beautiful new chapter for you and your family."

When you make the event more than just the activities, it compels people to come with the expectation to engage and participate at a deeper level.



Connection is Key

It's been mentioned before but needs its own call out - the important thing is making connections.

It's probably happened to you before. You attracted some people, a good time was had by all, and somehow you never saw most of the attendees again. You wonder, "What's the point? Why all this work?"

What's the good of sowing the seed if no grass sprouts up? You can't expect everyone at every event to flock to your church services. But you should have the expectation that every event should at least bring someone, maybe many someones.

If there is anything you need to focus on, it's staffing good volunteers and people from your church to have the sole focus of making relational connections.

Teach the team how to break the ice, ask questions, and engage new people. Show them the importance of introducing attendees to other people so they have multiple points of contact. Over-communicate (like we're doing here) the importance of making these connections. Why?

People will not come to your church just because you put on a fun event. They will come to your church because they feel a connection.



Grassroots for the Win

A short word about spreading the word. Nowadays there are SO MANY THINGS competing for people's time and attention. Traditional advertising (a newspaper ad, Facebook ad, flyers, and signs) still have a place - especially signs. But nothing gets people to an event like word of mouth.

You can really make a great one-two punch of using your existing church members to do only two things: 1) invite, and 2) connect. That's it. Tell them to invite their co-workers, family, friends on social media. And then connect with new people at the event.

To be successful at this, you have to set goals and reward good behavior. Celebrate wins, offer incentives, maybe even run a little healthy competition among friends to see who can bring the most people. T-shirt to the winner. Or something like that.

Personal invitations and connections are the glue that holds ministries together.

Lasting Impressions

Events that make an impact don't just leave attendees and participants with a good feeling. They should leave your church with good information. That information has a purpose. Enter it into your database and create profiles for each attendee so you can reach out and keep the conversation going.

To seal the deal and make connections that will be "sticky" - leading people to visit your church and maybe even get involved - you'll want to follow up well.

Use the information you gathered at your event to create another touchpoint that will leave your guests with a lasting impression.

Follow-up ideas to consider:

- Send your guests a gift card or discount to a local establishment as a "Thank You."
- Offer a digital resource that aligns with your event. This could be an article, PDF, photos, or a video that offers some value to the attendee.
- Create a gift basket that can be sent to everyone who attended.
- Place a phone call to check in with attendees and see how you can pray for them.
- Share your next teaching concepts with an invite to join.
- Invite them to join your next event, holiday service, food drive, etc.

Spend some time with your team determining what would make the greatest feel-good impression of your church. Then do that for all the attendees from whom you gathered contact information.

An event is just the beginning of an ongoing relationship.



Building on History



As you get more and more active in your community, you'll start to see which events and gatherings yielded fruit and which didn't.

Plan more events like the ones that already worked. It's not complicated.

Where it gets a little more strategic is what we call linking events. This is when you plan out several events, all designed to build on the momentum of the last one.

For example, if you have a lot of young families in your area - which you would know if you did a demographic analysis - you could start with a back-to-school service project, supporting a school, or giving away school supplies. From there, you do a movie night after the first week of school, invite them to the fall harvest festival, then follow up with a fun Christmas party with things that kids would like to do. After that, you could do a spring break celebration or local mission project and cap it off with a special Easter service. All geared toward providing touchpoints for young families.

Before you know it, the people in your community will just start to expect that every so often, your church will be doing something that they want to be part of. You'll become top of mind. They begin to wonder and anticipate what's next. They might even visit your website on their own to see what's coming up.

Implant a history in the minds of your community that your church is the place to be because you've always been there, offering great events.



Celebrating Widely

After you've done all that, don't feel bad about soaking in it a little. Let your church know the impact their efforts have made. Share numbers on how many people attended all your events last year, how many of those people got involved in church, how many of those made a faith commitment, and so on.

Next, share it with your neighbors. Make a list of everything you did to serve the community last year or this year. Put out some posts, some flyers, even a local newspaper ad about how your church has been a central figure in your area.

This last part will help drive home the point in people's minds that your church is here, it's active, it cares... And they should want to be part of what God is doing through your church!

In Summary

Small events with big impact are a lot of work. But that doesn't mean they have to be hard. If you follow the steps laid out in this guide, maybe even create a checklist, you'll start to see consistent teams in your church understand how it's done. The key is consistency. You must consistently:

- **Know your neighbors**
- **Reach out**
- **Offer value**
- **Follow up**
- **Celebrate!**

We hope this helps you be the preeminent provider of fun, faith-filled connection points in your community, creating a big impact through small events.

Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

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