

5 EASY HOLIDAY OUTREACH IDEAS FOR ANY CHURCH

& How to Turn Those Guests
Into Long-Term Disciples



A Wondrous Time ... for Outreach!

While the Christmas season can be one of the busiest times of the year, it's also a great time to engage new people in your community with the mission of your church. Spiritual matters are often at the top of mind during this season!

You might think, "Sounds great, but we don't have enough time to do anything meaningful, do we?"

Don't give up so fast! In this guide, you'll find five outreach ideas your church of any size can do in short order. You can scale each of them to fit your church's size and the time you have to prepare.

The five outreach ideas also include a step-by-step itinerary to help you clarify what you need to do to get ready. These are just examples. Adjust them to your own unique contexts.

At the end of the guide, we'll give you some ideas about how to follow up with these guests so you can incorporate them into your church family.



Holiday Wrapping Station

While many people consider the experience of wrapping gifts one of the great joys of the holiday season, others have neither the time nor desire to do it. Whether we want to or not, most of us will have gifts to wrap during the season. That's what makes this a particularly nice outreach effort. You'll simply set up a station either in your church or – better yet – in a high-foot-traffic area of your community.

The Plan:



1. Pray. Only God can bring fruit from an outreach effort. As you begin this effort to share God's love through this project, ask him to bring you into contact with people your church can invite. Ask him to guide you as you plan and follow up with the people you serve.



2. Define the purpose of your event. Clarify up front if your wrapping event will primarily be about outreach or whether you want to use it as a fundraiser. If you want to use it as a fundraiser, people will pay for the service. Certainly, this will bring you into contact with new people you can invite to your church, but you'll likely reach more people if you're willing to do it for free. Either way, clarify why you're making the

effort up front.

Also, it's good to set some introductory goals for the event. Set a specific number of people you want to serve during the event. This will help you know how many supplies to get and the number of volunteers you need to mobilize.



3. Find volunteers. You'll need volunteers to wrap gifts, engage visitors, and follow up with attendees. Be particular about the gift-wrappers you enlist. Some volunteers you enlist may not be well suited for wrapping. They need to be meticulous with their wrapping but also be able to do it quickly. It can be a tough combination to find.

Volunteers for follow-up and visitor engagement should have warm,

impersonal skills. You'll also want someone with administrative gifts to lead the projects.

By the way, consider creating an assembly line where certain volunteers cut wrapping paper, others wrap, and another group deals with ribbons/bows. It may help your team be quicker.



4. Choose a location and date(s). Finding the right place to host this event is critical. You can choose to have it at your church (particularly if your church is in an urban environment that sees a considerable amount of foot traffic), but it may limit the number of people you can serve.

Your best locations will be near shopping centers or malls (or any place with both foot traffic and shopping). Because so many people these days shop online, those two characteristics aren't deal-breakers, but you will likely need to invest more time and resources into promotion if your situation is different.

Pick a date or dates for the event (likely at least one Saturday between Thanksgiving and Christmas). Holding a wrapping event a few days before Christmas may be particularly helpful for last-minute shoppers.



5. Gather supplies. You can either purchase supplies or ask your congregants for donations. Here are the items you'll need.

- Wrapping paper (make sure you have some kid-friendly paper available)
- Ribbons and/or bows
- Scissors
- Tape
- Gift tags
- Pens
- Holiday decorations
- Printed invites to holiday services (with dates, times, directions, and your website URL)



6. Promote the event. You need to make sure you get information about the event beyond your church walls. Leverage social media (particularly Facebook) for quick and cost-effective promotion. Urge your congregation to get the word out through word-of-mouth.

If you're holding the event in a place where you're depending upon foot traffic, leverage day-of-the-event promotions, such as posters or even walking billboards.



7. Set up the station. Arrive at the event one hour early. Organize your supplies for a smoother experience. Decorate your location with holiday decor to create an inviting atmosphere.

Consider having some light holiday snacks available for guests to enjoy as you wrap their gifts.



8. Collect guest info. Create a simple sign-in sheet where you gather contact info. Only ask for information you need to invite them to church (either phone number or email

address). Include a short note at the top of the sign-in sheet that says you will only use the information to let them know about holiday events. Get rid of the contact info after the holiday season.



9. Engage with your guests. Warmly greet guests as they arrive. Start friendly conversations as they arrive.

As your team is wrapping the gifts, keep the conversation going. If you have holiday snacks, offer the guest snacks and an opportunity to rest. Ask about their holiday plans and talk about yours. Invite your visitors to join your church for worship. Give every guest a printed invitation to your church.



Holiday Cooking Class

The holiday season offers a chance to savor all the special recipes that are only enjoyed during this time. But those yummy entrees and treats shouldn't only be for people who know how to make them. With this special outreach idea, you can put those tasty dishes from your last potluck to work in your outreach efforts.



The Plan:



1. Pray. Start by lifting this project up in prayer. Ask God to help you invite people to the class who not only need your cooking expertise but the spiritual community your church can provide. Pray for the volunteers and the planning involved.



2. Define the purpose of your event. Make sure everyone understands why you're hosting the event. If it's considered outreach, most participants should come from outside your church.



3. Find volunteers. Of course, you'll need some skilled cooks to make this work. You will also need people who can communicate their cooking strategies with others. It's possible you can find two people (a talented cook and a skillful teacher) to work together in doing this. You'll also need volunteers to help get the word out and to help with registration. You'll want a few extra people in the room during the classes to help with necessary tasks and start conversations with students.



4. Choose a location and date(s). Of course, the best location option for this outreach would be your church's kitchen if you have one. If you don't, see if you have a member with access to a commercial kitchen. If those options don't work, consider holding smaller classes in the homes of your members.

One of the advantages of the cooking class as a holiday outreach is that, even at a late date, you have several different scheduling opportunities—particularly if you have access to a church kitchen. You can choose to host multiple classes on different recipes or types of food. (For example, host one event for Christmas desserts, another one for entrées, and another for side dishes. You can also schedule these classes throughout the months of November and December. Nail down your schedule as quickly as possible.



5. Gather supplies. Your supplies will largely depend upon the recipes you choose to feature in the class. Make sure you have supplies to make a couple of batches of the recipe so everyone can taste-test the results. Besides ingredients, you'll need basic

cooking supplies, such as measuring cups, mixing bowls, etc.

Prepare printed recipe cards participants can take with them of the recipe(s). Include step-by-step instructions on how to complete the recipe and a list of items needed.



6. Promote the event(s). Of course, start with the obvious ways to promote these classes. Share it on Facebook. Consider creating some social media ads. Leverage word-of-mouth by encouraging your members to invite their friends and family. But you can get creative with this, too. Depending upon your community, you may be able to go door-to-door handing out Christmas cookies and offering people an opportunity to learn how to make the treats you're passing out. Or pick major shopping days and pass out invites at a mall or shopping center.



7. Set up for the class. Arrive early to do your setup. Divide your setup into two areas—the kitchen and registration. In the kitchen, organize the ingredients to make it easier during the class. Put together the seating arrangement in a way where everyone has a clear sight

of those preparing the recipes. If you're in a small kitchen where seating isn't possible, keep the time short so people don't become too tired of standing.

Prepare a small registration table where you can greet people and let them sign in.



8. Collect guest info. Encourage people to give you the contact information you'll need to follow up with them. Don't collect more information than you need. An email address and a cell phone number should be fine. Clarify that you won't hang on to the information after the holidays.



9. Cook together. Involve your guests in the cooking when possible. Consider inviting a student to help with the cooking, such as measuring, chopping, etc. Many people learn best through participation!

As you work through the recipe, make sure you don't get so focused on the end product that you forget your purpose—to meet new people who might want to get involved in your church. If possible, have some church members spread throughout the class and engage with the participants during breaks.



Community Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

The desire to participate in meaningful holiday traditions, particularly among young families, in your community is more widespread than you might think. This simple outreach allows you to engage these families — as well as to re-engage families who only attend your church during the holiday season.



The Plan:



1. Pray. You'll be reading from the Bible, so you already know God's Word won't come back empty (Isaiah 55:11). Still, ask God to speak through the service and draw people to himself. Pray for the volunteers that will be needed to make this outreach possible.



2. Clarify goals. Clarify with your team that you want to reach new people with this outreach. The strategy will be different than if you were just hosting a service for your church members. You likely want to discuss

this with your members and encourage them to bring friends and family to the event.



3. Set a date. If at all possible, host the event on Christmas Eve or as close to that date as possible. Of course, you'll want to host the service at night.



3. Find volunteers. You won't need as many volunteers as with other outreaches in this guide. Make sure you have volunteers to serve as greeters and ushers. Post greeters by your doors to welcome guests. Ushers can

stand at the front of your sanctuary and hand out an order of service and candle to people as they enter.

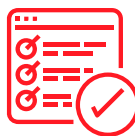


5. Invite guests. Start by encouraging your members to invite friends (and especially) family. Consider giving them printed invitations to pass out. Social media ads (particularly Facebook) will help you get the word out to guests in a cost-effective manner. Consider going door to door a week or two before Christmas and inviting your neighbors to the service.



6. Gather supplies. Obviously, the key supply is the candles. You'll need more candles than people you expect to attend. (Aim for about 30 additional candles.) You'll also need any decorations you plan on using (see below).

By the way, you should have a fire extinguisher handy anyway at your church building, but for this service, you'll want to ensure it's in good working order. Though you're likely working with small candles, they can still be dangerous. Accidents happen!



7. Create an order of service. Be as simple as possible with your order of service. The entire service shouldn't take any more than an hour and maybe as little as 45 minutes. You'll likely have at least five elements—a greeting, opening prayer, Christmas carols, Gospel reading, candle lighting, and a benediction/closing prayer.

Consider going through one of the Gospel narratives of Jesus' birth and lighting candles for each of the characters in the story.

End the evening by taking the candle attributed to baby Jesus and lighting all the candles in the room. (Or you can invite people to come to the front to light their candles from the baby Jesus candle.) Then, sing a final carol together. "Silent Night" is a great option for this. Remind attendees that Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12) and commissions us to take his message of hope to the world around us (Matthew 5:14-16).

If you'd like, you can add other elements, such as a short devotional or a special children's choir performance. Just remember that holiday schedules are tight. You may frustrate guests if you keep them too long, particularly if you host this on Christmas Eve. It's one thing to host a long Christmas Eve service that is primarily designed for your members; it's entirely different to do that for a service designed for outreach.

8. Decorate. Depending on how your church normally decorates the sanctuary for Christmas, you might already have this settled. You just want to make sure your sanctuary looks nice and festive. Err on the side of warm and inviting rather than cold and formal.



9. Invite people to fellowship afterward.

Because you're hoping to involve your guests in the life of the church after the holidays, it's important to spend some time getting to know the people who attend. Ask congregants to bring in their favorite Christmas treats (enough for 15-20 people).

Ask guests to join you for holiday snacks after the service. Encourage congregants to mingle during this time and get to know guests.



10. Develop a small flier with the next steps.

Create a half-sheet page with dates and times of upcoming events at the church. Make sure you have information about your regularly scheduled weekend worship services and any Sunday School or small groups your church has. Include your church website and phone number on the paper as well. Hand out this paper as people leave the service/fellowship time.



Hot Cocoa and Cookie Giveaway

Hot chocolate and cookies are an integral part of the holiday season. Handing them out in a prime shopping location can be a great way to meet new people and invite them to your church.



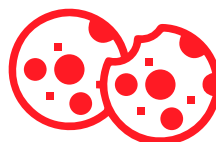
The Plan:



1. Pray. Ask God to bring people to your coffee-and-treat stand that would be open to attending your church. Pray for volunteer support from your church family.



2. Clarify your purpose. Make sure your congregation (particularly your volunteers) understands that you're hoping this event will help your church connect with people who do not have a church home. Consider defining a goal of how many people you hope to serve and how many church invitations you want to make.



3. Decide how you'll get your holiday cookies (treats). If you have a strong cooking or kitchen ministry in your church, you may decide to centralize the baking procedure. In that case, your team will plan the menu and purchase all the ingredients for your cocoa and treats. Your cooking team will then prepare the food together.

You could also ask congregants to bring in their favorite Christmas treats. In that case, you'll want to have people sign up for specific treats so you ensure enough treats have been prepared. Your church may still choose to purchase and prepare the cocoa in a centralized manner.



4. Pick a date. Because this outreach is not associated with any particular holiday, you have the opportunity to do it throughout the winter. Pick a date when you can set up your stand in a high-traffic area. The week after Christmas, when many people may be off of work, maybe the ideal time to do this.



5. Enlist volunteers. You'll need a few volunteers to sit at your station. The more volunteers you can enlist, the smaller shifts each will need to work. Ideally, have at least four volunteers at the station at a time (two to pass out the treats, one person who can greet and converse with guests, and a fourth person to make sure the treat selection remains well-stocked).



6. Gather supplies. If you're going with the more centralized cooking approach (see point 3), you'll need all the ingredients for your treats. Those will vary depending on what you choose to make. Besides any specific food supplies, you'll also need:

- a table
- chairs for your volunteers
- hot cocoa
- marshmallows
- napkins
- paper plates

- cups
- information about your church



7. Set up your cocoa-and-treat station. Create a sign saying something like: "Free Hot Cocoa and Cookies." If you have different kinds of treats, display at least one of each kind on your table. You can keep the others in warming dishes. Try to keep as much of your supplies out of sight as possible, simply to make for a cleaner, more inviting experience.



8. Engaging guests: As people arrive at your treat station, greet them warmly. Thank them for visiting you. If the line doesn't get too long, strike up conversations.



9. Set up a drawing. You'll want to include a way to gather contact information so you can follow up with those who visit your station. Come up with several small but desirable items you can give away. Consider adding one item of more value, if possible. Create a sign that asks people to give their name, phone number, and email address for a chance to win a prize (and name the prize or

prizes). Clarify that you'll just use the contact information to contact them and let them know about future church events.



10. Hand out next-step fliers to guests with their treats. Before the event, print up small (likely half-page) fliers that have

information about your church on them. Include the basics, such as worship service times, Sunday school/small group times, website URL, etc. But also include any upcoming events that might be especially interesting to guests, such as a membership class, food pantry, clothing closet, etc.



New Year's Eve Party

Invite your community into your church for an evening of fun and celebration as you welcome a new year. Many people enjoy attending parties on New Year's Eve. Your church's celebration can give them an opportunity to have fun in a safe manner.



The Plan:



1. Pray: Ask the Lord to help you prepare effectively for this event and to bring people to it who might want to attend your church.



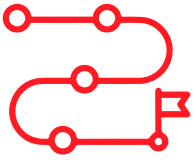
2. Clarify goals. While it's great to host a New Year's Eve celebration for your church family, make sure everyone understands the goal of this event is to introduce more people to your church. This will impact how you promote the event and the kinds of activities you hold at the party, emphasizing outreach and connection.



3. Define the time. Obviously, you already know the date. Clarify how long before midnight you want the event to start.



4. Enlist volunteers. You'll need volunteers to plan, decorate, greet, cook, engage children, and follow up. Each area will have a considerable amount of work to prepare for the party. Ask one person to lead each area and organize a team to complete the work.



5. Plan the schedule. Every church will plan different activities for this event. It should reflect the skill set of your volunteers and the interests of your community. Think through the following possible elements.

- Games (Consider board games, active games, and sporting activities if you have space for them.)
- Photo booth
- Music
- Food
- Children's Activities
- Midnight celebration (How will you ring in the new year? Balloon drop? Noise-makers?)

Be as detailed as possible with the schedule so everyone knows what to expect. Make sure the activities you've selected allow for a smooth transition between elements. Make a specific plan for how you'll ring in the new year at midnight.

Consider including a short (no longer than 10 minutes) devotional time about a topic related to starting fresh. If possible, connect this devotional to an upcoming sermon series you can invite guests to attend after the party.

Make sure you specifically plan for children. Parents have very few New Year's Eve activi-

ties they can participate in where they don't need to find a babysitter. One of the bigger challenges you'll face with children though is thinking through what happens as they get sleepy. Make sure you have opportunities for children to rest.



6. Get the supplies. Have each of your teams create a list of what they need and give it to a central person who can make the purchases. Even with a last-minute event like this, you'll want to gather supplies as early as possible to ensure no surprise problems.



7. Create a handout about your church. In a simple, clear way, describe key activities you want to tell guests about—specifically your worship service, small group/Sunday school experiences, and other next steps. Include contact info for your church, particularly your church's website URL.



8. Set up for the event. Start setting up as early as possible on Dec. 31. Clarify with your different teams who are responsible

for different set-up activities. Make sure your church looks clean and festive before the party.



9. Put together a sign-in table. Create a specific place where new people can sign in with their name and contact information. Only collect the information you plan on needing for further follow-up.



10. Engage guests as they arrive. Train volunteers to warmly welcome your guests as they enter the party. While you're not planning this event for members, you'll want as many of your church family to be in attendance as possible so they can spend time conversing with guests. Ensure you have a dedicated team to answer questions about your church at an information table.



Building a Follow-Up System for After the Holidays

Outreach alone never makes a great goal. You might get someone inside of your building or make initial contact with the ideas described in this guide, but that's just the beginning. Your church's true impact begins when you incorporate your guests into the life of your church.

So, how can you build a follow-up system that helps you assimilate those guests well? Start with these five principles.



- **Collect information safely:** You can't shy away from collecting information about the people you're engaging. You need a way to get back in touch with people if you plan on following up.

But you need to do it in an ethical way. That means taking care of the information you're giving. The topic is way too big for this guide, but aim to be transparent in how you plan on using people's information. Ensure you have consent to use the data you have. Only collect what you plan to use and protect the data like you expect other organiza-

tions to protect yours (the digital golden rule!).



- **Use segmentation:** Data is most helpful when it's the most segmented (separated by specific characteristics like age, gender, marital status, etc.). Segmentation allows you to target later communication to specific people who may be interested. Say you collect information from a single mom. You'll engage her much more effectively with communication about a Mother's Day Out program than with information about a new men's group you're starting. Send her

emails about that men's group too frequently, and she's likely to unsubscribe. Your challenge is to get as much information about guests as you might be able to use but also to not ask for so much that you scare people off.



- **Leverage technology:** Technology helps you use the data you've collected effectively. A good, easy-to-use church management system is an essential part of effective follow-up in the 21st century. The best technology doesn't impede the personalized touch; it enhances it.



- **Communicate in a timely manner:** We live in a fast-moving society. You'll need to reach out to guests within a few days while their experience with you is fresh.



- **Lean toward personal.** We get sent a lot of cookie-cutter communication these days. Aim to be as personal as possible.

A system to implement

Using these four principles as the foundation, here's a system you can implement quickly after one of the outreach activities described in this guide.

1. Collect data during the event. Use a sign-in form or a comment card. Or get creative and provide a digital option if it fits with your activity.

2. Segment your data. Put all the information you have into some kind of database or spreadsheet. Categorize the participants by key characteristics (gender, age, etc.) and interests.

3. Send a welcome email within 48 hours.

The best part about leveraging technology is the speed at which you can act. You can have an automatic email ready to go out as soon as the contact is in your system. Of course, this is much simpler with a church management system. If you don't have one, just get the email out as soon as you can. No, this won't be personalized (later communication will be), but it will thank the person for attending and give a few quick reminders of ways he or she can connect with the church (such as the times and dates of your holiday worship services).

4. Send a personalized note or call in the first week. Have someone from your church contact the guest and thank him or her for coming to the event. Be sure to mention the next steps, but the focus of the call should be gratitude and connection (not promotion).

5. Update your data regularly. Every time you make contact with a person, take the opportunity to update information with what you learn. For example, you might

discover over the phone that the person has a child. Note that in the record so you can connect with them more strategically.

6. Periodically reach out. You don't want to be a nuisance to someone who clearly doesn't want to attend church. Still, you never know when a situation will change, and a person will have more interest in attending your church. Schedule later times to personally connect with guests. These contacts should be progressively less frequent.

To follow up most effectively, nothing beats a good church management system. If you don't have one currently or you don't have one that can do the above steps well, the new year is a great time to get started.

ACS Technologies has multiple church management system options that will take your follow-up efforts to the next level. Learn more at acstechnologies.com.



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 1-844-467-3256

 solutions@acst.com

 180 Dunbarton Dr, Florence, SC 29501

acstechnologies.com

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