

Telling God's story

back2church sunday

AIM

This document contains further information and stories about back2church Sunday, the aim of which is to encourage people who have been to church to return.

INTRODUCTION

Back to Church Sunday is now the largest single local-church invitational initiative in the world. It is based on the simplest and shortest step in evangelism - that we should invite someone we already know to something we love; invite our friend to our church. According to research (and anecdotal evidence) there are a large number of people who used to go to church but no longer do so for a variety of reasons. It is often hard for people to come back either to the church that they have left or to any church. This project aims to give people the idea of doing returning and an invitation to do so, coupled with an assurance of welcome.

Some churches have already been taking part in back2church Sunday. This initiative, which began in Greater Manchester in 2004, is mentioned on page 47 of the Exploring Evangelism booklet and is focussed each year on the last Sunday in September. The material in this document is supplementary and could help you to plan a back2churchsunday event at your church.

Let me tell you (1)

When Marion was invited to church by her friend Anne she thought 'Why not?'

"I don't think I have ever been to a church service where I have laughed so much."

After attending Back to Church Sunday at St Mary's Haversham in Oxford, Marion went on one of their Alpha courses. Back to Church Sunday changed the way she thought of church.

"Churches to me were always cold, severe places in many ways, where you went and got preached at and told off on a Sunday - it wasn't much fun. Now it's different. There's a variety of speakers and approaches. It's very welcoming. I don't remember church being like that in my youth."

Marion encourages those who've also stopped going to church or have never been to church to 'give it a try and go with an open mind'.

"There are many different forms of church. If you don't like the first one you go to, go to another one. If you go with a friend it's likely that if your friend likes it you will too."

Marion continues to attend St Mary's and encourages other Christians to continue inviting friends to church.

"What is the worst that can happen - they say 'no thank you.' I don't think there is any reason to be fearful of asking friends to go along. There must be a hundred and one things you invite friends to that for some reason or another they can't or don't attend. Don't just put BTCS down as a one off event - if they've come the first time, invite them back."

Telling God's story

back2church sunday

Let me tell you (2)

Big Welcome draws crowds on Back to Church Sunday

Thousands of returning or first-time churchgoers were welcomed through church doors last weekend as 4,500 churches participated in Back to Church Sunday. The Baptist Times reports that many of the 475 Baptist churches taking part saw significant increases, especially where they had redoubled their efforts they had made in previous years. Kidlington Baptist Church, Oxfordshire, had 'felt very flat' at the low response last year, but the addition of large plywood family figures outside the church and a barbeque after the service drew an extra 20 visitors. St Andrews, Bletchley, went all out and put on 12 events leading up to the weekend. Its first participation two years ago 'fired people up' and has resulted in a tripling of the congregation from 25 to 75 regular members in two years.

Source: The Baptist Times (1/10)

Web links: <http://www.baptisttimes.co.uk/news3.htm> and <http://www.baptisttimes.co.uk/>

PREPARATION

The Back to church Sunday website: <http://www.backtochurch.co.uk/> has lots of information about preparing for the event, below are just the most important points that we used.

- Pray that it's the right event for your church
- Get a small group to prepare, if possible use newer people and best of all people who don't go to church, they are often willing to contribute and have a different perspective.
- Obtain the materials e.g. posters and invitation card (you may have to access them via an Anglican colleague)
- Advertise well
- Motivate people to pray who to invite and then to invite them
- Prepare the service especially with returners in mind, including the welcomers
- Prepare the 'goodie bags', which are a gimmick to provide information to those who attend

THE EVENT

The national back to church Sunday is 25th September 2011; it is at a similar time each year. When we did it we kept to that date and we tried to have a 'normal service' but with special regard to returners/new people. So special attention should be made to avoid pitfalls such as assuming 'everybody knows' as they don't. Make sure that the leader explains what is going on. Look at the service as if you are new or better still run it past someone who doesn't normally come. Also avoid the comments to returners apart from 'lovely to see you', they may be very sensitive.

THE 'GOODIE BAGS'

This is an effective gimmick in giving people information in a fun way. When we have done it we bought paper bags off the internet and then put the churches name on them using a rubber stamp. The organising group then had to decide what to put in them, which was an

Telling God's story

back2church sunday

interesting exercise, this is what we did:

- We gave them to everyone, not just returners
- We had 3 bags, young children, older children and adults with different contacts
- We gave them out at the start of the service and explained what was in them
- The children's ones had colouring crayons, sweets, Christina stickers and an invitation to the junior church.
- The adult's bags had a letter explaining the event and contact details of the minister if they wanted to know more, this included a quiz which we used over coffee after the service. There was also a picture of a holding cross, some 'refreshers', a bookmark with the Lord's prayer on one side and church information on the other.
- The older children's bags had a mixture of the other two bags and an age appropriate booklet on faith together with a balloon.

The goodie bags were a great success and later on we went to the other groups that meet in the church e.g. Brownies and gave them a similar bag which included an invitation to junior church.

FOLLOW UP

Obviously any returners that come should be followed up in a sensitive way, this is down to good personal skills and listening to the Holy Spirit as they should know that they are welcome to come again and get involved, but also they must be free to choose not to.

Some combine harvest with back to church Sunday, but we didn't, we had it later so that returners could be invited to a series of special services in the autumn i.e. harvest, remembrance, advent. Hopefully by the time Christmas comes they have been three or four times

More web links for getting started

Southern Synod have been involved in back2church Sunday. See their website for an interview with Martin Hayward

<http://www.urcsouthern.org.uk/cms/mission/front-page>

Visit the back2church Sunday website

<http://www.backtochurch.co.uk/page/1/Home>

The date for 2011 is 25th September, so you'll need to do some 'Thinking ahead'.

Find out how to get involved here:

<http://www.backtochurch.co.uk/page/3014/Get+Involved>

This year "BTCS Packs" need to be ordered online.

Each church has to register and order their resources individually and the deadline date for this is the 15th June.

So if you wish to participate please order your pack using the following

link: <http://www.backtochurch.co.uk/page/3059/Register++Order+Resources>

Telling God's story

back2church sunday

Don't forget to send in your stories and videos afterwards. Please also let Vision4life know what you did if you got involved in back2church Sunday.

Prayer

Lord of the Harvest, we pray that you will stir your people to reach into the fields of mission around us. Give us boldness to approach our friends and neighbours and even family members and invite them to join us for worship. Please show us how to prepare things well so that they will feel welcomed and valued and not be put off by the trappings of church or reminded of the hurts from bad experiences in the past.

Help us to share the heart of the loving Father who waits expectantly at the door to see his lost sons and daughters coming home.

Amen

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

There are more resources for Evangelism Year on the Vision4life website

Acknowledgements

This material was prepared by Brian Harley and Andrew Willett who have given permission for it to be used for Vision4life. Andrew would be glad to answer questions or receive feedback about Back2church Sunday. You can contact him on Andrew Willett on revwillett@gmail.com.

HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group and the coordinator about general issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

Website issues can be dealt with through web@vision4life.org.uk

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk