

Holiday Evangelism

Ideas for summer outreach

AIM

This document contains ideas, information and stories about how churches in holiday areas might reach out to visitors.

INTRODUCTION

Some churches have a special opportunity to share their faith with many people who don't live in their own community. Some are in town centres where folk from outlying areas come for shopping and other business. Others are in towns or villages that attract tourists. Whilst there may be no direct benefit to the local church there are tremendous openings to reach out to people who may have more time on their hands than usual and who are often more open to talk about God, life issues and problems when away from their home setting.

Let me tell you

One congregation has visitors to its services almost every Sunday of the year and experiences a regular flow of people into its tiny bookshop that is open 6 days a week next to the church. This was created in the 1980s as an open door ministry rather than a business and is staffed by willing volunteers. Many of those who call into the shop are not Christians. Some are just passing time and wander into every shop on the High Street while others might be after a gift or card for someone back home or something to read in the deck chair. A prayer list allows them to ask the church to pray for a need or for a friend. Whenever the doors of the main building are open people tend to pop in - they often say they don't go to church but they love to look around churches. Some want to sit and be quiet for a short while, often to think of a loved one. A cup of coffee and an informal chat can change people's whole view of what a church is and give them a little more idea of what it means to be a Christian. All of that without going out of the way to reach people....

Getting started

Here are a few tips to be open and welcoming to "un-churched" to visitors:

- Keep notice boards up to date and make sure they say something about Christian faith – information about last week's jumble sale is not going to sow for the Kingdom!
- Having an open door is a vital first step to engaging with visitors.
- Some simple literature that explains the Christian faith should be readily available – e.g. Making the Connection by J John or Why Jesus? By Nicky Gumbel.
- Produce a welcome pack which is aimed at passersby rather than newcomers to the area. Include some information about the Christian faith, a gift and perhaps a CD with a welcoming word and a suitable Christian talk or mission centred sermon for people to listen to in the car on their journey home. Encourage them to find a church near their home to explore things further.
- Have a visitors' book and write to the people who sign it or send them a Christmas greeting. You may never know how that might bless and encourage them.
- Make sure there is clear information about services on notice boards and in local hotels and camp sites and at the Tourist Information Centre. Consider placing a poster with all the local church service times – and do a new version each year.

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Pray about these things and be intentional in aiming things at the “not yet Christian”.

Beyond the walls of the church

A few ideas for leaving your comfort zone and stepping out in more overt ways:

- Hold open air services which are intentionally friendly to newcomers and those passing by. Make sure there are “greeters” on the fringes to chat to people and help them find a seat – not in the empty front row!
- Street Theatre or sketch boarding can be effective if there is a quiet square/precinct.
- Have a Prayer Table or Prayer Tree in a very public place and receive requests to be included in prayers in the forthcoming service. Healing on the Streets is a much more bold model where prayer is offered:
<http://www.out-there.org/homepage.htm>
- Combine with other local churches to resource a tent at a local agricultural show or rock festival. This doesn't have to be overt evangelism – generous hospitality breaks down barriers and opens up conversations about grace. See this inspiring example from the Isle of Wight church network now in its 7th year:
<http://www.solacetent.com/>
- Put a float in the carnival but make sure it is a good one and produce quality literature to handout, otherwise it reflects badly on the church and reinforces stereotypes!
- Hold a fun day in the open air with a free BBQ, bouncy castles, face painting etc. Some Christian organisations **with** much experience in this “field” are there to help:

On the Move specialises in helping set up and run big BBQ events:
<http://www.onthemove.org.uk/>

Miracle Street has portable stages and can help run fun programmes alongside local churches:
<http://www.miraclestreet.com/>

- Beach Missions have been popular over the years but have found more recently that children don't tend to come to the same place day after day as in the times of more static holidays. One off events can prove more effective. Get permission if you plan to do anything very public - don't upset the local business that owns the concession.

Prayer

Lord of creation, thank you for the beautiful places that you have made for us to enjoy.

Help us to point others to the one who has given all this splendour to revel in. Please guide us to find ways to connect with people as they visit our community and give us a generous heart to welcome them and to make time to share something of our story and your big story.

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Give us courage as a local congregation to make a special effort to reach those who may never come to our services and join our church but whom God loves and cares about and who he has led to our door. Help us to foster a Kingdom mindset, to sow seeds liberally and to embrace vision that looks far beyond just building up our local church.

In the name of the one who loved to talk to people, cook on the beach and who went out of his way to reach the lost and lonely, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

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

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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