

Practical Helps for Smaller Churches—Events

Gary Farley

Center for Rural Church Leadership

The life of many smaller churches is enriched by a set of annual events. Carl Dudley has made much of this in his writings about the culture of small churches. Dudley identified four categories of events in the life of a small church. They are as follows:

- “Cycle of the Year,” refers to events that occur according to the calendar. Historically, much of the work of churches is tied to Christian calendar events such as Christmas and Easter, as well as national and community events.
- “Congregational Identity” events are those that give expression to the life of a particular congregation. Examples might include, homecoming, harvest festival, Spring revival, and pastor’s anniversary.
- “Life Passages in the Church Family” are those events that mark changes in the life of persons in the congregation. Examples included marriages, baptisms, and funerals. These cannot be calendared as part of an annual planning process, but they are very important event.
- “Participation in the Wider Community” refers to events that are most often organized by some group other than a particular congregation, but in which a church may wish to actively participate. Examples would include community Thanksgiving services, county fair, or Old Settlers Days.

Your church probable has several events each year that fall into each of these categories. Some of the best things the church does, some of the best times, and perhaps some of your greatest frustrations are related to these event. Let me suggest that a good strategy for leading a smaller church is to utilize the events for reaching the larger goals of the church. I have sometimes hear pastors of smaller churches, most often former pastors, brag about how they killed some cherished annual event. But I have heard far more stories about ministries ruined when someone who was inspired by this brag attempted the same at the church that he or she was serving. A much wiser approach is to wrap around the event other activities that address some functions of the church that may be neglected. For example, one might initiate an outreach effort by tying to an effort to get the unchurched and disinterested member to the church.

I have prepared a list of common events in each of these categories. And I have left some blanks for you to add local ones. This will allow for local customization. Now the key concept here is for you to identify which basic functions or tasks of the church you can intentionally address in and through each of these events.

Let me offer an illustration. I have a deep commitment to Soil and Water Stewardship Sunday. It focuses on our Christian responsibility to be good stewards of the land, water and air. The National Association of Conservation Districts in cooperation with your local county Natural Resource Conservation office, provides excellent materials for Bible study, education of children, community projects, and worship related to an annual theme. (The theme for 2000 is Community Waters.) I have used this event to address all six of the basic functions of a church. Sunday School classes have used the Bible study material for their lesson material that morning. I have preached on the subject. The year when the theme was “Our Treasured Trees”, we planted a tree. We have cleaned up a stream and enjoyed good fellowship in the process. One year money was raised to buy a water purification machine

Congregational Identity	Worship/Education/Outreach Ministry/Fellowship/Missions
Revival	
Homecoming	
Work Day	
Vacation Bible School	
Picnic	
Watermelon Social	
Fifth Sunday Hymn Sing	
Stewardship Commitment	
Children's Home Offering	
Missions Offering	
Mission Day Camp	
Men's Day	
Pastor Appreciation	

Participation in the Wider Community	Worship/Education/Outreach Ministry/Fellowship/Missions
World Day of Prayer	
Prayer Walk	
Community Revival	
Thanksgiving Services	
Holy week services	
Christmas Fund Drive	
Food Bank Drive	
Community Fair	
Flea Market	
County Fair	
Hunger Walk	
Old Settlers Day	
Ethnic Festival	
Community Clean up	

As you have done this process, you were probably surprised at just how many events your church is participating in.

Did not find some functional areas that are weak?

Did you get some ideas for new events?

Did you see some that might be dropped?

What might you wrap around these event to accomplish some needed work or improvements?

The next task is to look at projects. This will be offered in the third article in this series.