



Outreach Planning Your Outreach for Christmas Eve

THREE LEGS OF A STOOL

Take a three-legged stool. Now saw off one leg. It still works. You can still sit on it and receive some support. It just does not work nearly as well as when it had three legs.

So it is with your outreach program. When a church's outreach program is incomplete, it can still be useful. It can still provide some "support" to your congregation's overall Gospel ministry. It just will not do it as well as if you addressed all three phases of an outreach program: 1) promotion, 2) welcome, and 3) follow-up.

In this module of C13, we want you to consider and plan for how your church will address those three areas.

SOME DEFINITIONS

Let us begin by making sure we are all on the same page with terminology to avoid any confusion.

The C13 program is about reaching *prospects* with the Gospel. There are many different types of prospects. There are "the lost." These are people who do not have saving faith in Jesus. Read Luke 15 for three parables about the lost, parables which illustrate how zealously we search for the lost, as well as how boisterously we rejoice with the angels if just one lost soul is "found."

However, believers can be prospects too. There are "the un-churched." There are many people in America who have come to faith through the gospel, but for one reason or another have never affiliated with a church. They might not see any need. There are also "the de-churched". These Christians grew up going to church, but fell away from church at some time. Now, apart from the means of grace, they could eventually fall from faith.

These weak Christians with no church home are prospects as well. All of them – the lost, the de-churched, the un-churched – need to be *evangelized*.

When we talk about *evangelism*, we are referring to the sharing of the gospel. *Evangelism* comes from the Greek word for gospel. That word can be translated "good news." Evangelism takes place in many ways. In a broad sense, when a pastor preaches his sermon, he is performing evangelism. He is sharing the Good News of God's grace. That is precisely why the C13 program stresses that fact that inviting members of your community to join you for worship is an important part of your evangelism program. In the sermon, they will be *evangelized*.

However, evangelism takes place in other ways. Generally, when we think of evangelism, we think of a one-on-one



conversation that takes place. A believer shares “the reason for the hope” that we have with a prospect (1 Peter 3:15). Unlike the sermon, the witnessing can be tailored to fit this prospect's specific circumstances: an illness, a broken marriage, a lost job, depression, etc.

Outreach is everything a congregation does to help evangelism take place. So your church sends out 2,000 postcards to your community, inviting them to join you this Christmas Eve. That is not evangelism. It is outreach. You are not sharing the Gospel, but trying to create an opportunity to share the gospel. Alternatively, you host a *Christmas for Kids* one day VBS. You get to share the gospel with kids, and that is evangelism. That alone makes the *Christmas for Kids* program a worthwhile effort. (Just look at Jesus' words in Matthew 19:14). However, that *Christmas for Kids* program can also serve as outreach. You now have contact information for parents whom you can invite to join you on Christmas Eve, where they will hear the Gospel.

An outreach program *must* contain plans for evangelism to be “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). Your goal in doing outreach is not really to connect the people with your church, but with Jesus Christ. You can connect people to your church with all sorts of programs, but *only the gospel* has the power to connect someone to the Lord of Life. Thus, all our outreach efforts have at their core an evangelism effort.

Those efforts can take place by *come strategies* and *go strategies*.

Simply put, the *go-strategy* aspect of outreach and evangelism takes place when the law and gospel are shared out in the world: in living rooms, over the phone, on the front steps of the house. The *come-strategy* aspect of outreach and evangelism occurs when believers invite prospects to come to another place where the gospel will be proclaimed.

These two are sometimes pitted against one another. The reality is that they *always* go together. For example, Philip is called to follow Jesus. He goes to Nathaniel and says, “*We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*” (John 1:44). Philip proclaims the gospel to Nathaniel. God had kept his promise to send the Messiah. Nathaniel is skeptical so Philip responds, “*Come and see,*” inviting Nathaniel to come to another place where he will hear the gospel further expounded by Christ himself (1:45).

Every single outreach program will have components of *come* and *go*. If you train your people to share their faith, you are equipping them to go into their communities and let their light shine in their vocations. However, don't you hope that if a member shares his faith with a friend or neighbor, he will also invite them to join you for worship? You had a *go* strategy, but it contains a *come* element to it. On the other hand, conversely, you invite the community to join you on Christmas Eve. That is a *come* strategy. Nevertheless, part of your outreach program for Christmas Eve *must* include follow up with the prospects who join you. Eventually, the ideal would be for a pastor or trained evangelist to sit on the couch in the home of that prospect, and share the gospel one-on-one. Therefore, your *come* strategy will incorporate aspects of going.

In C13, we hope to provide practical "nuts and bolts" ways for you to reach all types of *prospects*. It will include your congregation engaging in *outreach*. That outreach will have *evangelism* as its ultimate goal. Moreover, there will be both *go* and *come* aspects of your strategy.

With those definitions in place, let us look at the three components of an outreach program – promotion, welcome, and follow-up – and apply them to your C13 efforts.

PROMOTION -----

If you are going to invite the community to a Christmas Eve service, they obviously need to know about it. Ideally, you would like people to see what you are promoting in a variety of ways and over a period of time. For example, if the only time Ms. Smith hears about your Christmas Eve service is when she receives a postcard inviting her family to attend, that may be enough to get her to join you. However, if she gets that postcard *and* sees a temporary sign in front of your church containing the same imagery that is on the postcard, that makes a connection in her brain: *that* church is the one that invited me to Christmas Eve. Those are both *outreach*. You have not shared the gospel yet. Nevertheless, by promoting your Christmas Eve service in multiple ways, you might have increased the likelihood you will get to do so with Ms. Smith and her family.

Thus, you want to promote your Christmas Eve service in as many ways as is practical. Ideally, you want to have those promotions tied together in some way. The two things that will help you are:

1. The title of the Christmas Eve program: *Born to Save Us*. Every time someone sees your Christmas Eve program promoted, he or she should see those words.
2. The image we are using for this program.

Here are ways you could promote your Christmas Eve service.

Ways to promote your Christmas Eve service

Website

Postcards

F.R.A.N.
invitations

Signage

Doorhangers

Newspaper adds

Radio or TV adds

Website

Good promotion for your Christmas Eve service – *and everything else* – begins with a website. It is the main way people get their information today. If your church does not have a website, consider building one in the next month or so.

With a website, you need to focus on two things. First, you need a decent domain name. Even if you use a free web-hosting site, you will want to purchase a domain name and have it link to your free site. (You do not want your church website to have another company's name as part of your domain name!) Second, you want the site to be of decent quality because a poorly designed site is actually worse than no website at all.

A good website makes your other outreach easier. You can refer people to the website for more information. Thus, you do not feel the need to pack your postcard or a brochure with every piece of information. You provide the basics. People can learn the rest from your website.

The WELS has contracted with a company called Finalweb to offer a simple way to set up a website. Go to <http://www.finalweb.com/wels.asp> for more information.

The C13 program offers digital images promoting the *Born to Save Us* Christmas Eve service. Any WELS or ELS church may use the images on their website for free.

Postcards

Postcards are a great way to do outreach, for three reasons. First, they are cost efficient. Second,

they let you target specific areas. Third, you can use them in a variety of ways, as we will detail in a moment.

If you plan to use postcards, you need to answer two questions. First, how will you be mailing them out? Second, how will you produce them?

- **How will you be mailing them out?**

In planning how to mail out your postcards, you can find a lot of information online about different types of bulk-mailings. (There is also a C13 module discussing them.) However, it might be worth a trip to your local post office to speak with the postmaster. You can even call ahead and offer to take him to lunch. Explain to him that you are looking for the most cost-efficient ways to do bulk-mailings for postcards. He may encourage you to look at the US Post Office's *Every Door Direct Mail* program. This is a great way to target specific areas of your community, and it does offer a break on postage. However, there are even more cost-effective ways to mail postcards. Ask about pre-sorted bulk mailings or rural route mailings. Give him an idea of how many pieces you would like to send out. Your postmaster wants your business, so he will point you in the right direction.

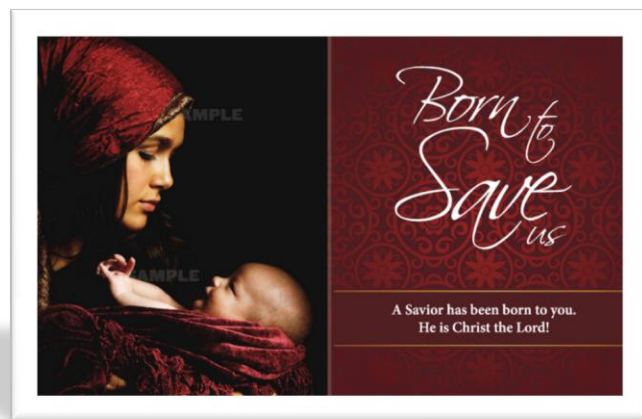
The other thing you need to clarify is the formatting for your cards. Different types of mailings have different size restrictions. Also important is the back of the card, where the mailing label goes. For example, if your post office is going to scan your address label electronically, they may not allow you to have any print on the bottom two inches of your card. It is good to clarify all this with your postmaster.

- **How will you produce them?**

For a larger run of cards (2000+), it will be substantially cheaper to have a commercial printer do your cards than doing them yourself. However, even if you are printing a relatively low number of postcards (1000 or so), if they are full color, it will still probably be more cost efficient to have a commercial printer print them for you. In addition, even if it is roughly the same price, the quality of a commercial printer is going to be higher than the printer you have in your church office. At the very least, consider getting the full-color front side printed for you. Then if you want, you can run the backside of the cards through your printer at church, printing them in grayscale. (You would need a printer than can handle cardstock.)

- **ECHTprinting.com**

The C13 program has partnered with ECHT Printing, a printing company affiliated with Faith Lutheran (WELS) in Sharpsburg, GA, to make the production of your postcards as easy as possible. For orders of 1000 to 4999 cards, it costs 6.4 cents per card. The price drops with higher quantities. That price is to print the front of the cards in full color. The cards as shipped to you as printer sheets (there are four cards per sheet), which you can then take to a local printer. You can have them print the back in whatever way that works best for you.



For orders of 3000 or more, ECHT Printing will also print the back for 8.9 cents per card. By comparison, if you ordered the identical sized cards from VistaPrint.com, it would cost you about 12 cents per card. ECHT Printing is not trying to make money, but wants to help WELS churches in

their outreach efforts.

ECHT Printing can also do postcards for *Every Door Direct Mail*. They even offer mailing service – formatting, labeling, sorting, and bundling your mailing – for an additional 3 cents per piece on orders of 3000. (Note: that is not postage. Postage is paid separately directly to the post office.) You can find more information at <http://www.echtprinting.com/>.

To encourage churches to try postcards, the C13 program is offering a \$100 grant to the first 120 churches that order postcards from ECHT Printing. (As stated in C13 promotions, priority for those grants will be given to churches that have four or more members who registered for C13.) This would make smaller quantity orders free and larger quantity orders even more affordable.

- **What should your postcard say?**

This is something churches often debate. Should the postcard be simply an invitation to the service or should it contain a law/gospel message?

On the one hand, evangelism by postcard is not a great idea. Studies have shown that when people see a long law/gospel message in print in their mailbox; they throw it away without reading it. Therefore, if your postcard is crammed with a witness and lots of Scripture passages, while your intention is wonderful, unfortunately the gospel will probably not even have a chance to work, as people will put your witness in wastebasket.

On the other hand, you *are* a church. To say nothing about the meaning of Christmas would be odd at the least, and potentially off-putting to prospects who are unchurched or dis-churched Christians.

So aim for a balance. Consider the back of our C13 postcards offered through ECHT Printing. It reads:

*Come and hear the story of the child **born to save us**. This Christmas join us to remember the night when God changed the world by sending his Son as your Savior. Our worship will feature an inspiring message, favorite Christmas carols, and a place for families to connect with Jesus, the child born to save us. A Savior has been born to YOU; he is Christ the Lord!*

- **The “success rate”**

So how many people will come because you mailed a postcard? Obviously, it varies highly from location to location. However, a good rule of thumb is that you can expect one to two families to show up for every 1000 cards you mail.

However, do not determine the value of postcards *just* by looking at how many people attend this one invitation. Postcards get your church’s name out there. As you probably know, people tend to look for a church during times of crisis. What often happens with churches that use postcards is that, throughout the year, they will have people showing up at such times. A marriage is falling apart, and the couple shows up in church. When the pastor follows up and asks why they chose his church, they say, “You’ve invited us to Christmas and Easter for two years. We just never made it.”

F.R.A.N. Invitations

F.R.A.N. stands for friends-relatives-associates-neighbors. Studies have shown repeatedly that when a church member invites someone to come along for a worship service, the prospect is much more likely to say yes than if the prospect had just received a postcard invitation. Thus, a good outreach campaign *will* include F.R.A.N. efforts as a part of it.

This requires two things, training and resources.

Your saints have a New Man inside them who *wants* to invite their friends and relatives and neighbors to church. However, they also have an Old Adam who whispers, “*You don’t know how.*” Take away the Old Adam’s excuse. In the months leading up to Christmas, make sure you communicate often and clearly to members that you will be providing resources to help them invite their F.R.A.N. contacts. We will spell out what those resources might be in a moment.

Also, train your members how to use those resources. For example, imagine if your members did more than simply mailing an invitation to the Christmas Eve service to their F.R.A.N. contacts. If they also called up those friends and offered to pick them up on Christmas Eve, that invitation will be much more likely to be accepted. That is a compelling invitation!

C13 is offering templates to help you produce F.R.A.N. resources and materials you can use to offer simple training to your members. Below are the types of invites that work well with F.R.A.N. outreach.

- **Postcards**

Remember, we said there are multiple ways to distribute those postcards. You can give them to your members and have *them* mail them. (Just be sure that if you give them ones that contain your non-profit postage stamp, your members understand they will *still* need to put stamps on the invite.)

So, if you are a church whose budget is tight, consider ordering 1000 postcards from ECHT Printing. Those will be free with the \$100 grant (provided you are one of the first 120 churches to order). Print the backside yourselves using a local printer. Then give them to your members and have them mail them out to their F.R.A.N. contacts.

- **Quarter-fold cards**

If you take a letter-sized piece of paper and fold it in half, then fold it in half again, you have a card that is 5 ½” by 4 ¼” – a standard sized invitation. You can get invitation-sized envelopes at any office supply store. [HERE is an example.](#)

Your church can modify and print the template we have offered on some high quality paper. Offer as many invitations and envelopes to members as they will take and mail to their F.R.A.N. contacts. It is a simple way you can produce quality looking invites yourself. (Although, with the envelope cost, they are more expensive than postcards.)

- **Business card invitations**

You can print business cards very affordably through online companies. Some will even let you print a couple hundred free if you pay the price of shipping. The beauty of the business card invitation is that your members can carry a half-dozen in their pocket at all times. As opportunities present themselves with their F.R.A.N. contacts, the member can distribute a simple invitation.

We have provided templates that you can use to order cards at any online printer. Alternatively, contact ECHT Printing if you wish to have them print business card invitations for you.

- **E-vites (Electronic invitations)**

Many of your members use social media (or just plain old e-mail) to communicate with friends more than anything else. Why not encourage them to use those platforms to invite their F.R.A.N. contacts to Christmas Eve?

Again, we have provided images you can use for free. Your members could post that image on their Facebook page. They could put it in an e-mail they send to a friend, asking them to join you.

You probably have some tech-savvy youth in your church. You can ask them to produce a video that incorporated that image. That video can go on YouTube and your website. Members could

forward it to their F.R.A.N. contacts.

Signage

A few WELS churches have signs with LED components capable of displaying a picture. If so, please feel free to use the C13 images.

There are many other WELS churches that signs with changeable letter marquees. Remember that the title – “Born to Save Us” – is part of the branding of your Christmas Eve promotion. So be sure to include that on your sign if you are using it on your postcards or F.R.A.N. invites.

However, if your church does not have either of those options, you can still use signage to promote your Christmas Eve worship.

- **Temporary signage**

You can order every possible dimension of vinyl banner in full color, and most cost you under \$100.

You can get your banner made with grommets (metal-rimmed holes you can use to tie or bungee the sign to something) or pole pocket. Vinyl banners can then be displayed a number of ways: on your church, attached to your current sign, between two poles, etc. You can also purchase A-frame displays that fold up for easy storage. Some communities even have designated locations where you can put up approved temporary signage in high-traffic areas on a short-term basis. Contact your local city government for information on available options.

Temporary signage will not only promote your Christmas Eve worship, but is also a great way of helping people in your community connect your other forms of promotion with your congregation. If they receive a postcard or a F.R.A.N. invite, and then they see your temporary signage in front of your church and the images are the same, they make the connection: “*that* is the church that invited me to Christmas Eve.”

- **Yard signs**

You see them all the time at election time. Why not use them to promote something more important than who you want to be your next congressional representative? They are not expensive. Right now from USPress.com, you could order 50 yard signs, 24” by 18”, full color on both sides, with H-stakes for mounting – all for approximately \$255. Use the images we have provided for C13 to design the sign. Then put those in the front yards of the 50 member homes closest to your church.

Door Hangers

You can purchase door hanger cards. These are printed on cardstock and have a hole so you can slide it onto doorknobs. However, they tend to be pricey.

A much more cost-effective way to do a door hanger campaign is to use door hanger bags. [You can purchase them HERE for less than 3 cents a bag.](#) (The 6” by 12” size probably is best, as it will fit almost any material.)

With a door hanger bag, you can include multiple pieces of information. For example, for this coming Christmas, you could include:

- a postcard inviting the person to the Christmas Eve service;

- a tri-fold brochure about your church;
- information about your school/preschool; and
- a letter from the pastor, introducing himself to the community.

The other wonderful thing about using door hangers is it allows your people to get comfortable with canvassing. Canvassing terrifies many of our members. They picture canvassing as going door-to-door and asking someone if they were to die, would they know where they were going. Canvassing need not be that.



Door hangers can be distributed with what is called a “walking canvass.” You simply walk through the communities around your church. You can knock on the doors and ask the people if they have a church home. If they do, you wish them well. If they do not, you leave a bag of information with them. Alternatively, you can simply hang a door hanger bag on every door. (IMPORTANT NOTE: In most communities where there are street-side mailboxes, it is legal to hang them on the flag. It is *illegal* to put your canvass material *inside* the mailbox. However, you can hang it on the flag or put it in the newspaper box.)

Here is a great way to approach this. On Wednesday nights – December 4, 11, and 18 – have volunteers stay after your midweek Advent worship to stuff 1000 bags with information. Then, on the subsequent Saturdays – December 7, 14, and 21 – have different groups from your church do a walking canvass. One Saturday it might be your youth group. The next Saturday, it could be the church council. (What a great way for leaders to serve as models!)

Newspaper Ads

Many newspapers will offer churches a reduced rate to run an ad during the holiday season. The problem with that is that your ad is placed next to twenty other churches, and the entire listing is oftentimes buried in a section of the paper that is more commonly used for lining a birdcage. Therefore, just because your paper claims a readership of 50,000 people, realize that does not mean 50,000 people will see your ad. If the cost is high, you *might* be better served using that money for postcards or some other form of outreach.

Some newspapers will let you do a flying insert that costs about the same or even less than a print ad. You simply supply the paper with the number of flyers equal to the amount of papers they print. As their machines assemble the paper, your flyer is automatically included, just like other store flyers. While the cost for this is often equivalent to a print ad, remember that you need to provide the flyer. (In some cases, you can pay the newspaper to print it for you.)

Radio or TV Ads

With these, remember that you get what you pay for. A \$500 price for an ad that plays on TV 10 times sounds great, until you realize it is at 4:00 a.m. all 10 times.

However, sometimes those “dead spots” are more than cheap; they can be free. For example, some radio stations – especially Christian ones – will offer to promote your Christmas Eve worship times

for free. Do you have a retiree at your church with time on his or her hands, looking for a way to help? Ask him or her to call every radio station and TV station in your community and see if they would give you free airtime.

For more information about how to best use radio or TV ads in your outreach program, contact your district Commission on Evangelism representative.

So, You Have Promoted Your Christmas Eve Services...

You have sent out some postcards. You have some temporary signage in front of your church. Your members are handing out business card invitations to their friends. Some people in your community see that image of Mary and Jesus three separate times! They go to your website to learn more, and there it is again. They were thinking about bringing their family to church on Christmas Eve anyway and yours is the one that stands out.

That is outreach. You have created an opportunity to share the Gospel. So what happens when that family shows up? Let us talk about the second part of an outreach program.

WELCOME -----

If your church has not yet done so, we encourage you to consider making the Commission on Evangelism's WELCOMING WORSHIP booklet a study for your church council. It addresses in details all the things a church needs to consider when they invite people to join them for worship. For the purpose of this planning document, we will touch on some key components of the *welcome* aspect of outreach.

The Service Time

This aspect of welcoming prospects to worship is often highly under-rated. Take the regular Sunday-morning service. You might love the 8:00 a.m. service. You can attend, go to 9:15 a.m. Bible class, and be home by 10:30 a.m., with a whole lot of your day left. However, in many parts of the country, 90% of your prospects will not consider coming to church at 8:00 a.m.



It is no different with Christmas Eve. What will serve your community?

Is it a 5:00 p.m. service, that allows families with young children to attend, but still gives them time to get home, have dinner, maybe open a present or two, and get in bed at a decent time? Is the major industry in your community the type that lets people leave work early on Christmas Eve?

Is it a 7:00 p.m. service? That allows people to get home and grab a quite bite to eat before heading into church. They are home by 8:30 p.m., which still is not too late for the kids.

Is it a 10:00 p.m. service? A late-night Christmas Eve service, worshipping by nothing but the light of candles, might be a nostalgic memory for many of the de-churched. Will that appeal to the wider community?

Is it a service *not* on Christmas Eve? Might you offer your Lessons and Carols service on another night?

These are things you need to wrestle with. Make a decision that serves your community with the gospel.

First Impressions to a First-Time Visitor

Your house probably looks quite different than it normally does when you have company coming over for dinner. You want to make a good first impression. Hopefully, you are going to have a lot of guests join you on Christmas Eve. You want to do the same with them.

Consider when they first pull into the parking lot. You can probably remember some time when you went into a large building for the first time and had no clue where anything was. Perhaps, if the building was large enough that it had multiple entrances, you were not even certain of where to enter. Is it any different for people visiting your church?

A good exercise for you to go through as you plan your Christmas Eve worship is to walk from the

parking lot, at night, to the inside of your church. What do they pass on the way in; a well cared for landscape or one that looks greatly neglected? Is it obvious where people are to enter? What if their child needs to use the bathroom before worship? Is that clearly marked? If you offer a cry room or staffed nursery, how is that communicated?

In planning to welcome people for Christmas Eve, try to see your building for the first time. What looks cluttered and ugly? Can it be removed? What needs to be explained? How will you go about explaining it? We are providing worship folder templates for C13. Much of this information – location of bathrooms and nursery – can be listed there. Might you need greeters *outside*, to help people find their way in or maybe even to help them find a good parking spot?

You get one chance to make a first impression.

The Friendly Factor

It comes as no surprise that in survey-after-survey people rank friendliness of a church high on the list of reasons they joined. (Generally, the only thing that ranks higher is quality of the sermon.) Even scripture says, *“Practice hospitality”* (Romans 12:13). How will you do that on Christmas Eve?

You respond, “Well, we have our greeters! They welcome people warmly.” Indeed, they do. Again, put yourself in the visitor’s shoes. Imagine that you walk into a new place for the first time, filled with hundreds of people, most of who know each other. When you walk through the door, two people welcome you and introduce themselves. However, after that, no one really speaks to you again other than perhaps a quick, “Hello.” They talk to one another, but not to you. What would that communicate?

Sadly, this is not an infrequent occurrence in churches. In many cases, it *is not* because our churches are unfriendly. The problem is the exact opposite. Our people are *very* friendly, and so they want to catch up with their friends and family. Therefore, the visitor goes unnoticed, precisely because friends are visiting with one another.

There is no one-size-fits-all way to avoid this.

- Some churches uses “secret greeters.” These people do not wear a nametag or welcome visitors at the door. Instead, they are scattered throughout the church. They know it is their job to look for and talk to new faces.
- Other churches use an “everyone’s-a-greeter” approach. Every member in church has received training so that they feel a responsibility to welcome new people with more than a “hello.” They are trained to engage prospects, learn a bit more about them, fellowship with them, etc. The danger in this is that since it is “everyone’s job,” it becomes easy to mentally pass-the-buck. *“There’s a visitor, but I need to talk to Joe right now. So someone else will talk to them.”* The C13 offers a series of bulletin inserts that can be used during Advent to help train your people to understand the mind of the prospect, and learn how to make the prospect feel welcome.
- Still other churches incorporate a greeting at the beginning of the service. The bells ring. The pastor greets the people, and then he encourages everyone to take a minute to greet the people sitting around them. Give this a good 30 seconds.
- Finally, the best approach might be incorporating all of the above. Have greeters at the door. Train the entire church how to greet and treat prospects. Have secret greeters who are especially zealous about this, to make sure no prospects slip through the cracks. Have a greeting at the beginning of worship.

Also, remember that welcoming does not just occur when a prospect comes on campus. They “feel welcomed” (or not) throughout their stay. A crucial time for welcoming visitors takes place *after* worship. Sometimes, visitors just want to get home. However, sometimes, when they see people staying behind – perhaps for refreshments in a fellowship hall or entry foyer – they consider staying too. That’s “social time.” Friends are catching up on how one another’s week went. It can be *hard* for new people to break into that. It requires your members to be alert to the new couple standing by themselves in the corner, sipping their coffee!

Here is a trick that home mission congregations often use. The pastor asks someone to visit his church and note how he or she is welcomed. It might be a friend or family member of the pastor from another WELS church, someone unknown to his congregation. The goal is to get an honest assessment of how a visitor is treated. It generally needs to be done by more than one person. However, might it be something you try in the months leading up to Christmas, as a way of assessing the friendly factor in your congregation. You might find that while you have a fantastic system in place for greeting people, visitors aren’t being greeted because of what we said earlier – that the friendly people of your church are focused on talking to other friends.

Parents & Children

Studies have shown that Americans are obsessed with their children. You have parents who not only go to every soccer game, but also watch every soccer practice. Parents grow upset with their child’s school if they think the child is being slighted in any minor way. What does that mean for our worship?

Your church needs to prayerfully wrestle with what things such as a staffed nursery or children’s message say to a visitor. Realize the visitor might have a completely different perspective than you.

You might feel that little children should be taught to sit in worship. However, the prospect might feel that he needs to really be able to focus on worship. He is going to church for the first time in ages. He wants to grow spiritually himself, precisely so he can be a better spiritual leader to his children. Therefore, *he* thinks, “*How am I supposed to grow spiritually when my three year old pesters me throughout worship?*” This prospect maybe has a new faith, but it is not mature. His immature faith makes him unable to distinguish between the fact that your church offers the word and sacraments in their truth and purity, unlike that church down the road, which twists portions of God’s word. What his immature faith *does* recognize is that they offer a staffed nursery, so he can focus on the word, and you do not.

The point is, you should not provide a staffed nursery *just because* it meets a perceived need of a prospect. If you worry about meeting the perceived needs of prospects, you will run yourself ragged. Instead, you consider providing a staffed nursery, because it might serve the gospel well. If it lets a prospect (or even a member!) grow in their faith so that they might better serve their children in that capacity, it has served the gospel.

Obviously, if you offer a staffed nursery, you need to care for the needs of the nursery workers. It cannot be the same person, week-after-week, unless you have multiple services so that they too might still be part of the assembly of the saints in worship.

It probably goes without saying that precisely because people are obsessed with their children, staffed nursery workers need to be highly trained.

The Worship Service

- **Compelling, not confusing**

Our Lutheran worship service is a compelling way to proclaim the gospel. The law and gospel are found throughout the service. Some say, *“But there are too many rites and ceremonies in our worship for 21st century Americans.”* If you do not think rites and ceremonies fascinate Americans, look at how many Dan Brown novels have sold over the past decade! Have you observed how everyone puts their hand over their heart during the national anthem? (That is a rite... a ceremony... a symbolic communication.) So traditions and rites might not be as big a stumbling block as we sometimes think. Instead, the challenge to our Lutheran worship is that if it is not comprehended, then it is not compelling, but only confusing.

The C13 program has suggested using worship service folders. We are providing them not just for Christmas Eve, but for the four Sundays in Advent and for Christmas Day as well. It allows your church, if you desire, to “test” the concept of using worship folders on a weekly basis. Worship folders do a number of things.

1. Worship folders make it almost impossible for someone to get lost. If a church is worshipping out of the hymnal on Good Shepherd Sunday, and the pastor announces that the church is going to sing Psalm 23 – *“The Lord is my Shepherd”* – the average visitor may be confused when he is looking at *Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel*, which is **hymn** 23. Or, he may be ready to read the Words of Institution and sing the *Agnus Dei*, which are found on *page* 23. Worship folders eliminate this. Some churches use worship folders for everything except the hymns. They sing the hymns out of the hymnal. Others print the hymns in the worship folder as well. (For C13, we have printed the hymns in the worship folders. Northwestern Publishing House has given us permission to print any hymn from their digital hymnal that is in public domain.)
2. Worship folders allow you to explain your rites and ceremonies, which make them compelling, rather than confusing. Why, for example, does everyone say, “Praise be to you, O Christ!” at the end of a Gospel reading? A note in the worship folder can explain to the prospect that Christians believe that through the word, the incarnate Christ is present. *“Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them”* (Matthew 18:20). Or how about an explanation at the bottom of the page explaining that the *Gloria* is partly comprised of a song sung by angels on the first Christmas Eve; and, therefore, when we sing it in worship, we can assume that the angels who are present with us are delighted that we would praise our God in the same way they did. Explain that for this reason, Christians have used this song regularly for over 1600 years.
3. Worship folders allow you to explain the service in the overall arch of the church year. At the front of the worship folder, you can provide a brief explanation of where you are at in the Church Year, explaining the emphasis of that season. You can offer a “theme of the day,” giving a summary of what you are talking about, explaining how everything – the three lessons, the psalm, the Prayer of the Day, the hymns – are all related. In the C13 worship folder templates for Advent, you will even find a suggested “series.” It is entirely based upon the assigned lessons for that Sunday. However, it also helps people to see how worship flows from week to week throughout Advent.
4. Worship folders give prospects (and members) something to hold onto and meditate upon. Do you think all your prospects have a Bible in their home? Probably not. However, if they take the worship folder home, they have scripture, prayers, and hymns to which they can meditate upon, giving the Spirit opportunity to do his good work.

- **Carefully selected music**

Singing is a *huge* part of the Christian's worship life. It always has been. Scripture encourages it. "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:18, 19).

Some of your prospects may not sing in worship. It will take time for them to feel comfortable with that, so instead they will silently follow along. However, many prospects will sing along *if they can*. It is important you give them opportunity. How so?

- Include *some* easy or well-known hymns every single worship service. It is fine if prospects and your members struggle with a hymn from time to time. Some hymns with amazing doctrinal content are hard to sing. That is fine. Just perhaps do not fill an entire service with hymns that are challenging.
- When you do select a challenging hymn, consider having a choir or soloist sing the first verse or two. It lets the people learn the tune.
- Always use a full one-verse introduction, even on longer hymns. It is *highly* confusing to prospects when churches play only the first line and then the last line of a hymn as an introduction. It does not take that long to play through the entire verse. If it is a more challenging melody, consider playing just the melody line for the first half of the verse.

Choosing your music carefully not only can help your prospects with hymns, but with liturgy as well. For our Christmas Day service, we have included the option to use a version of the *Gloria in Excelsis* that is done antiphonally. The choir sings the verses and the congregation sings the refrain, which is set to a well-known melody. Likewise, we offer examples of psalms where the choir introduces a refrain, then the congregation repeats it, and the psalm is then sung antiphonally. Thus, a prospect who is setting foot in *any* church for the first time could come into your worship and sing along.



You Have Welcomed People Warmly To Your Christmas Eve Services...

After having spent weeks promoting your Christmas Eve services in a variety of ways, you end up having a number of new families join you for worship on that night. Before that, you had done a self-analysis of how your church welcomes people when they come to your campus. You made a few adjustments, and so you welcomed these new people warmly.

Your work is *far* from over. What comes next is probably the most neglected portion of outreach.

FOLLOW-UP -----

Will some of your prospects return on the Sundays after Christmas? Perhaps some will. Most will not. They will not join you again until Easter unless you do some follow up.

There have been countless studies done about the effect that follow-up has on your prospects. The bottom line is that an aggressive, systematic approach to worship visitor follow-up makes it *two to three times* more likely that guest will return.

Collecting Contact Information

Obviously, you cannot follow up on worship visitors unless you have their contact information. The traditional way churches do this is with a guest register in the entry foyer/narthex. That *might* not be the best way. If you have greeters who are willing to strong-arm guests, compelling them to sign, perhaps that traditional way can work. There might be better options.

Some churches use pew registers. These are small pads of paper kept in a decorative binder of some sort. Each sheet of paper has room for five or six families to sign. Before worship or during the offering, these can be handed down the pew.

For C13, we are suggesting the use of connection cards. You simply put one in every worship folder. People fill these out before worship or at the beginning of the offering. They can then put them in the offering plate or in some collection box on their way out of worship.

With either the pew register or the connection cards, it is important your members understand that they too need to fill them out. Prospects will typically do what everyone else is doing. If no one is filling out the cards, they will not either, even if encouraged. If everyone is filling them out, the prospect will feel a type of peer-pressure to do the same. (A side benefit of having members do this is, if you use pew registers or prospect cards every Sunday, it allows your elders to track attendance easily, even in a large church. A system can be put in place for them to make a "care-call" on members who miss three weeks in a row.)

They Came To God's House. Now Go To Their Home.

Typically, churches follow up on prospect by sending them a form letter or nice thank-you card. That is wonderful, but almost certainly inadequate if that is the extent of your follow-up program. Generally, follow-up requires a personal visit.

Some will object, "*But won't a personal visit scare the prospect away? That is very aggressive. People like their privacy.*" Indeed, a face-to-face visit may intimidate 5% of your prospects. Do not let that prevent you from making those visits, because for the other 95%, you visit makes it much more likely that they return.

- **The first visit: a lay member with a follow-up package**

Within 48 hours of a prospect visiting worship, someone from your church should visit the prospect at his or her home. The goal is simply to deliver a follow-up package. This package could include:

- A letter of thanks from the pastor or another church leader;
- Some information about your church and ministries, such as preschool or school; and

- A thank-you gift. Some churches use small copies of one of the gospels. Other churches use a mug or refrigerator magnet with the church logo and contact information on it. Mugs or refrigerator magnets are things that everyone holds onto. Still other churches have people bake cookies. It is not so vital what the gift is. It is simply there to convey the thought: *“We are glad you came and hope you can join us again.”*

In recruiting lay members to do this, it is important to stress to them that you are *not* asking them to go inside and witness to the prospect. You are simply asking them to stop by on the prospects doorstep for 45 seconds and deliver a package. If the prospect is not home, the member leaves it on the front doorstep with a handwritten note explaining: *“Sorry I missed you, _____. I just stopped by to say we were happy to have you join us at _____ church. Hope you can join us again soon. Yours in Christ, _____.”*

- **The second visit: the pastor**

After the lay-member has dropped off the follow-up package, the next step is for the pastor to make a follow-up call. (This can also be done by a trained evangelist in churches with massive amounts of visitors. However, prospects tend to be blown away when a pastor does this himself.) Here is where the pastor has to have time to sit down, get to know the prospect, and share the gospel one-on-one.

A great time to do this is about a week after the lay member drops off the follow-up package. If the pastor follows up that same week, the “love” can seem a bit overwhelming. Waiting until the following week gives the visitor a chance to possibly come back the following Sunday, something that is more likely now that the lay member has dropped off the follow-up package. Thus, the pastor would be calling on a *two-time* visitor. That is low-hanging fruit!

- **There needs to be a system**

This system of follow-up is not overly complicated, but it does involve many little tasks. Consider.

- Who is collecting the information from the connection cards (or pew registers) and putting them into some sort of database? How do you tell if they are a first-time visitor or repeat visitor? (The C13 connection cards let the prospect indicate that.)
- Who is scheduling the lay visit to be made within 48 hours?
- Who is assembling the follow-up packages?
- Who is making sure it is recorded when that visit is made, so the pastor knows it is time for him to make a follow-up call?

These are things for your congregation to wrestle with over the coming months, if you have not yet done so. Get a system in place, so that if the Lord blesses you with guests on Christmas Eve, you might do aggressive follow up.

Note: This requires both pastor and members to understand that come December 26th, it is not “rest time.” Not yet! Yes, it has been a busy holiday season. However, there is follow-up that must be done! Make those 48-hour visits, *then* rest.

Moving Prospects Into Bible Information Class

As you follow up, some of your prospects will politely decline returning to worship. They might come again for Easter, but not right away. However, others will start coming more sporadically.

Bible Information Class (BIC) is, in a sense, the main goal of prospect follow-up. You want prospects to commit to sitting through a BIC, looking at all the teachings of God's Word, as summarized in the Lutheran catechism, so that the Holy Spirit might have ample opportunity to create and/or strengthen faith.

BIC invitations should come in multiple formats. It is beneficial if your church has a brochure about BIC that it can mail to the prospect explaining the details: what it is, what it covers, how long it lasts, etc. Some churches have that summary on their web page. Then you can just e-mail the link to the prospect. However, the best invitation is a personal call from the pastor, encouraging the prospect to give it a try. If the pastor has done the follow-up, he probably sat on the prospects couch. A rapport has been established. His encouragement can do much.

The best time to schedule BIC is probably three-to-five weeks after a major event like Christmas Eve. (If you offer four such events a year – for example, Christmas Eve, Easter, a summer sermon series, and a fall festival – you could offer BIC on a quarterly basis.) That gives you time to encourage prospects to attend.

A great way to get prospects to commit to BIC is to make it easy for them by scheduling it on Sunday morning. Offer childcare for BIC to remove that excuse for not coming. Then you can repeat the BIC lesson on a weeknight for those who could not make it or who could not stick around on Sunday morning.

Also helpful in the cases of F.R.A.N. prospects – i.e. prospects who came because a member invited them – is to have that member take BIC with their friend, relative, associate, or neighbor. Your member will benefit from the review of basic doctrine. In addition, it removes a lot of trepidation from the prospect's mind if they can take a "class" with someone they know.

Prospect Data Management

So, you do everything laid out above. As you well know, that does not mean that all your prospects are going to come back. Nor will all of them join the first BIC they are invited. So what do you do with their contact information?

You need to have a data management system. C13 is making a simple (and free) prospect management system available. We also explain Salesforce, a cloud-based contact management system you might consider. (Cloud-based means that the data is not stored on a church computer, but on a server that can be accessed from *any* computer or smart phone.)

With your prospects in that system, you can print mailing labels and use these to send a letter to your prospects every month or two. You can send out mass e-mails. You can even use programs like Phonevite.com to send mass phone calls. Keep your prospects informed of major events coming up at your church. Keep inviting them back.

Prospect management systems are also used to record visits. Say one of the prospects you meet on Christmas Eve does not come back, even after follow up. Give him a month or two. As you get close to Easter, that might be time to make another phone call or even a personal visit. A prospect management system lets you track when a prospect was last contacted, what was said, etc.

In Conclusion -----

We pray this outreach & evangelism planning module has given you some ideas of things you might try as we approach Christmas Eve. Remember the three legs of the stool.

- **Promote** your Christmas Eve service(s) as best as you can in a number of possible ways.
- Carefully think through how you will **welcome** those visitors when they arrive at your church.
- Have a system of aggressive **follow-up** in place, so that visitors are encouraged to return again and eventually join a Bible Information Class.

Resources Available

This document has mentioned a number of resources: connection cards, bulletin inserts to encourage your members to welcome guests, F.R.A.N. outreach materials. These resources will be made available on WELS Connect.

May God bless you, and may he bless your community through your efforts, this Christmas Eve and always.

