



HOLIDAY

P L A N N I N G G U I D E

THE UNSTUCK GROUP®

— WE HELP CHURCHES GET UNSTUCK. —

Most pastors can easily name the big days that bring high attendance—lots of new faces and the opportunity for a positive impact. But knowing about big days and planning for them are two different things.

Too often, these events sneak up on you, resulting in last minute planning, minimizing the impact you have.

When big days sneak up on you, our rule of thumb is to **polish what's working instead of trying to create something new**. Creating anything new requires time and planning, and time isn't on your side.

In our experience, most churches do a lot of over the top stuff that actually complicates the purpose of the service. It can alienate the first-timer instead of engaging them.

That's why we created this resource. These calendar-given gifts bring hundreds (and maybe thousands) of new faces into your doors. How can you leverage this to effectively engage and invite these guests back?

Put yourself in their shoes. How can you make them feel cared for without being overbearing? What would turn you off? A clear understanding of the first-time guest mindset can color your sermon preparation, the language you use in communication pieces and how your volunteers approach visitors.

We've outlined a few ways you can build on what's already working in your church during the holiday season.

As you work through this content, [use this planning template](#) to help you define how you're going to equip your team, engage your guests and execute with excellence.

PRE-GUEST ENGAGEMENT

How are you inviting and engaging people before they enter your doors?

We consistently see churches drift towards an insider-focus. It's not intentional, but our natural pull is to cling to what we know.

Because of this, actively engaging people *before* they are in the doors of our church can be challenging, but it's essential to build the Kingdom of God.

How can we approach it strategically? Here are a few ideas:

Equip Your People to Be Intentional with Relationships

Aside from the holidays, we hope you're encouraging and equipping your congregation to build meaningful relationships with people outside the faith. Without a previously-established relationship, most people won't take an invitation to church seriously. And outside of a relationship, there's no way to compel someone to take a step toward Christ.

As it relates to the holidays, how can you encourage and equip your congregation to be intentional with their relationships with family and friends who don't know Jesus? How can you equip them to invite someone to your service?

Next Step: Listen to this podcast episode—[Christmas Is the New Easter](#). It's full of practical steps you can take to not only prepare your congregation, but to get new people in your doors.

Be FOR Your Community

Our world often feels hyper critical and cynical, and many times outsiders have a similar view of our churches. We're often seen more through the lens of what we're against than what we're for. What if we could change the narrative so our churches were known by what we're *for* in our communities?

How could you be *for* your community during this holiday season?

Not too long ago, we interviewed Jeff Henderson, lead pastor of [Gwinnett Church](#), for The Unstuck Church Podcast. He shared some thoughts from his book, [Know What You're FOR: A Growth Strategy for Work, An Even Better Strategy for Life](#).

Next Steps: Read the book. Listen to [our conversation](#). Jeff highlights some dynamic and effective ways to engage and serve your community to help you develop relationships outside the church. Check out forgwinnett.org for some inspiration.

This strategy shouldn't be limited to the holidays; however, you should capitalize on the increased opportunity to connect with your community during this time of the year. North Point Ministries does a fantastic job of this. Check out their [Be Rich campaign](#) for some inspiration.

Content Marketing

We're not talking newspaper ads, postcards, billboards... that's all traditional marketing. People are ignoring that type of marketing. It's just become noise. We recommend starting with one question—

Who are you trying to reach?

How old are they? What do they value? Do they have kids? What are their jobs? What questions are they asking?

The win is to get them in the door this holiday season. How can you create a compelling, online on-ramp for these people based on what they care about?

Now is probably not the time to overhaul your website or start a podcast for the first time, but could you leverage the social media channels you already have in a more intentional way? Could you create a series of blog posts or a YouTube video series that is designed to provide helpful content during the holiday season to the people you hope to reach?

Next Steps: Listen to [Why Church Communications Is Stuck in 2004 - Episode 61](#) of The Unstuck Church Podcast for a more complete explanation and some ideas.

FIRST-TIME ENGAGEMENT

What are you doing that makes people want to come back?

They've shown up. Great work!

As you move forward in this stage in your [planning template](#), document the steps, champion and timeline that will best prepare you for how you're going to connect with your guests the first time they set foot on your campus.

Start with Polishing Your Guest Engagement Strategy

Invite a few “outsiders” to attend your church this weekend specifically to rate the friendliness of your church.

Ask a few people who fit the type of person your church is trying to reach, and let them know you want them to be completely honest. Offer to buy them coffee afterwards. Let them share their feedback however they are most comfortable.

Cast vision again to your First Impressions team.

Help your team understand the vital importance of their role. Help them understand *how* the First Impressions team engages guests.

The right engagement can make a good impression on the people who wander into your church this holiday season. Train your team with guidelines. For example, asking guests, “*Would you like me to show you our children’s area? Would you like a cup of coffee?*” can make guests feel very welcome as soon as they walk into the door. Consistency matters.

Reconsider where you locate your First Impressions teams.

Locate your guest engagement teams in the right places. While there is value in having door greeters, think deeper than the front door. Having intentional teams in the lobby, auditorium and hospitality areas can make a huge impact.

These teams should engage and celebrate all people—not just new people (identifying them can be a challenge in a growing church, especially on holidays). If a team member doesn’t know someone’s name, that person is the target. This will ensure both new and returning guests are engaged, feel God’s love and get a sense of community.

Think more strategically about how and why you collect guest information.

Most churches use some version of a connection card, but getting guests to fill out the card can be a challenge, especially at a holiday service. Here are a few ways to polish your information gathering strategy:

- **Make sure your guest services area is highly visible, easy to access, and well-stocked.**
Ensure church members aren't congregating there. New guests typically won't fight a crowd to get to the table. Make sure you have the right information available. Make sure volunteers at the guest service area are trained to collect the right information and explain quickly how it will be used.
- **Define your "ask" and where it fits in the service.**
Position your ask so people have time to respond. We've found the best time is the middle of worship or at the end of worship, right before the offering.

Texting is a more natural, 21st century way to connect with new guests in our churches—particularly for those new to the Church. And, it's less invasive. People can respond to a text at their convenience, or not at all, if the message doesn't warrant a response.

When considering your "ask," thoroughly think through your audience and what they value. Make sure that ask is something they're interested in, and that the request for information is minimal.

FIRST STEP ENGAGEMENT

Get these guests to come back.

It's a win to get people to attend your service. But, if that's all that's happening, we're not doing our job of helping people become a disciple of Jesus.

On average about 20% of new guests return to church. If you're going to make disciples, people who need discipling have to come back.

It's important to use this opportunity to ask the right questions to connect with the people who walk into your building. We are called to reach people. And reaching people, especially guests, requires good follow-up.

We sometimes have reset and remember, *"It's not about the numbers; it's about making disciples!"*

Retaining guests isn't for the sake of an attendance score, it is for the sake of reaching people with the gospel. It's about helping new, unchurched people meet Jesus and having their eternity changed. Although we can't catch everyone, we have to be intentional about following up with as many people as possible.

Here's our best suggestion—

Make Next Steps Simple and Clear

Gary MacIntosh and Charles Arn had some helpful data in their book [What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb For Leading Your Church](#). They found that the typical growing church will see 20% of their first-time guests become a part of your church. They'll see 40% of second-time guests become part of your church, and close to 60% will become part of your church after the third visit.

By making this first step simple and clear, you increase your chances of your guests coming back.

For a holiday service, don't make the first step ask a special experience or class. Invite them to come back to another service on a topic that relates to what they value and need.

We're seeing that people care very little about classes—they just want to get better at life.

Determine the Leader Who Will Own the Holiday Guest Engagement Process

If everybody owns it, nobody owns it. We've seen it work best when there is one staff champion and one team that owns the entire process.

Having one team that owns all of these phases of engagement helps lead people into the discipleship process—which is the win. This team needs to be gifted in the hospitality area.

Practically, train people to ask the right questions to get conversations going with new guests. People will most likely come back because of the people they meet—the community they feel. Setting up systems for your team to win will not only make your team successful, but will make your guests feel more connected.

On your planning template, take advantage of the champion section. Clearly define who is responsible for what to avoid things falling through the cracks.

A clearly defined, effective holiday guest engagement strategy creates the potential for your church to have a significant impact on people outside the church and outside the faith, ultimately setting the stage to lead more people to Jesus.

Start with inviting them back to a January message series on parenting, purpose or starting fresh. Think about what they value and move in that direction.

As you move forward, we can't emphasize this enough—**build your holiday guest strategy by polishing what's already working.**

If you haven't checked out the planning template, do.

Without defining and assigning next steps, you won't take the ones you intend to, and won't reach the people who need reaching.

[**Access the Holiday Service Planning Template**](#)

The Unstuck Group specializes in helping pastors grow healthy churches, guiding them through experiences that focus vision, strategy, team and action.

Church leaders bring us in when the church is declining—or growth is flat or slower than in previous years. Sometimes they've just experienced rapid growth and sense the same strategies and structures won't be able to sustain that growth in the future. Other times, they recognize the church lacks a clear vision for the future, but they are overwhelmed by the challenge of leading change and having to carry it all.

We bring a process that helps pastors assess ministry health, draw out the vision God's given them for the future, and create the team structure and action plans to see it through. Simply, we help church leaders clarify where God's called the church to go and how they are going to get there.

Six months after completing the Unstuck Process, 9 out of 10 pastors say they'd recommend us to another church—because they are seeing real results.

Interested in learning more?

Let's Talk

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