

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Reimagining Christmas

Episode 164

Don't Miss the Evangelistic Moment in an Unusual Year

It wasn't long ago that churches were scurrying to reimagine Easter online. The challenge for leaders was trying to picture celebrating Easter without an in-person gathering. As everyone likes to say during this pandemic, that was an unprecedented event for today's churches. But six months later, we're all a little wiser and more experienced. Now it's time to reimagine Christmas. Ultimately, this Christmas you can create a remarkable, nostalgic, shareable experience that helps everyone reimagine faith in Jesus—you just have to think outside the box.

Why to Reimagine Christmas Services This Year

- Unlike Easter, Christmas is a holiday that people outside the faith and outside the Church still engage. The Christmas service itself has many family traditions built around it, and most family members will attend when asked, even if they wouldn't usually consider going to church.
- With the pandemic still happening, we have to acknowledge that attending an in-person experience may not be a draw this year. Most people who are not connected with a church will probably not want to go to an in-person experience, wearing masks, socially distanced in an unfamiliar place, surrounded by an unfamiliar crowd of people.
- But there's an upside. Most people connected with the church are now used to attending church online. And, most churches are getting better at designing their online services. And Christmas has always been the holiday when people are a little more open to faith and open to coming to church.

Where to Start

As you begin your planning, start with two key questions:

- 1. What could we create online that would reach people outside the faith and the Church?**
If you don't start with this question, you'll default to doing what churches have always done, which is to put the team's best energy into designing an in-person experience and using the leftover energy to figure out how to put that experience online.

This year, give your best energy to designing an online experience first.

2. What online Christmas experience could we design that our attendees would love to share with their family and friends?

People like to share remarkable things. How can you make the experience remarkable?

The opportunity we have this year is to equip our attendees to *bring church to their family* instead of *bringing their family to church*.

Imagine your own Christmas gatherings and how easy it would be to watch the online experience in the flow of your Christmas gathering—before or after the meal, after presents, etc. If your people are going to do that, they need to know that it is an experience that will connect with their family and friends who are not connected to the Church.

Designing a Remarkable Online Experience

By definition, remarkable means “something worthy of being remarked about.”

- **Include elements of nostalgia.**

As humans, we LOVE tradition. Research has shown that it’s actually hard-wired into us. We love it so much that in 2010 a study from Northwestern University found that up to 93 percent of our actions can be predicted ahead of time. Tradition makes us feel safe, and we’re actually mentally healthier when we participate in traditions.

We have an opportunity to leverage that feeling this Christmas. Part of Christmas tradition and nostalgia includes...

- *The imagery of Christmas.* Think trees, snow, stars, presents, lights, carolers, etc.
- *The music of Christmas.* Choose the favorites—”Joy to the World” and “O Come All Ye Faithful” and “Silent Night,” not the outliers like “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.” Pick familiar songs that are easy to sing, and don’t over stylize them. Make it easy for people to sing along if they want to. Value the nostalgia of the song as you arrange it.

- **Make it continuously engaging.**

- *It can’t be too long.* Kids are in the room, and this online experience may be before a meal (which everyone wants to eat), or before presents (which everyone wants to open). You want this to be a great experience that people enjoy. So err on the side of being too short rather than too long. Leave them wanting more.
- *Pre-record this experience.* More people will engage when it’s an on-demand experience that fits into their holiday schedule. You’ll also be able to make sure the video and technology are at the highest quality possible for your context.

- **Make it easily shareable.**
Most of the time we think about shareability in terms of social media, but don't discount how important the *content* is to people's willingness to share the experience. For example, if the content is controversial and could bring tension to their Christmas dinner, they aren't going to ask their family to sit down and watch it together. Or if the experience uses churchy language people outside of the faith don't understand, or it doesn't address something relevant to their life, then they'll be less likely to share it. Don't just focus on the function of sharing it: Focus also on *why* someone would actually share it.
- **Last and most importantly, make sure it points people to Jesus.**
Many churches will have their largest audience of outsiders at Christmas. Make sure you tell them about the real Jesus. You have an opportunity to contrast the stereotypes about Christianity with the real person of Jesus. Encourage everyone to take a simple step through this experience. For non-believers it may be one passage or resource you encourage them to focus on as they consider Jesus. For believers it may be an act of service or a way they can reflect the real Jesus in their everyday life. Ultimately, this Christmas you can create a remarkable, nostalgic, shareable experience that helps everyone reimagine faith in Jesus.

Next Steps

Take this conversation to your team's Christmas planning meeting, and process these key questions together:

1. What could we create online that would reach people outside the faith and the Church?
2. What online Christmas experience could we design that our attendees would love to share with their family and friends?

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