

How To host a festival

HOPE25
HOPE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD



This guide will help you to plan your Hope25 event.

Purpose

A festival is a fun way for a church to share the Gospel with our community. Festivals can be popular community events and ways for a parish or community to make a cultural connection with the community and share the story of Jesus. Hosting a festival can help people who might not come to a church service or evangelistic course to make a connection with the church. Hosting a festival as an intentional, community-building, evangelistic event can serve the local community while building relationships and showing people that Christians and non-Christians can share common interests.

*Note that a festival can be a significant undertaking. You will need a few months of lead time (suggested 5-9 months) to ensure you meet all of the requirements from your local council and the Diocese. With less lead time, you may also struggle to get any community organisations or businesses involved as it may seem to them that this is a last-minute idea rather than a carefully considered plan for event partnership.

Planning

Team

Planning a festival is more than just a one-person job. If your parish or community wants to focus on hosting a festival, you will need to ensure that you have a good team to plan the event. If you want to do this but worry that it may be too much for your parish, consider speaking to another local parish to see if it is something that you can partner with. It may be helpful to designate an event coordinator who can also be visible on the event day to know where safety equipment is and be a designated point person for any issues.

Within your team, you will need creative people, administrative people, and those who can communicate with other community or creative groups you may invite to participate in the festival. While you need to have several people involved, you will want to ensure that your oversight team does not become so big that it doesn't function well. You may choose to have sub-teams for different aspects of the festival, such as the music, arts, stalls and local businesses.

Before the Event

Once you have gathered your team, you will need to consider what kind of festival you would like to put on and how you can best use that space to share the hope we have in Jesus with the people who attend. Once you have worked this out, you can begin to plan around it.

Consider a suitable date for the event. You may choose to hold it over one of the long weekends around this time or pick a weekend when people are staying more local. Check community and council websites to ensure you aren't clashing with a significant event. If you have a major church anniversary, you may make the festival a celebration of this anniversary and showcase the work of the parish within the community.

Think carefully about how you will use the event to share the message of Jesus with people. How will you ensure this is not just another fete or festival but a real opportunity for people to hear about our hope in Jesus? You might choose to use creative arts and storytelling, or you may have other ideas based on the gifts and skills of your community. One suggestion might be a theme of "food, fun and faith", or "unpacking the Easter story". You could stage a performance of the first Christians and their experience of Jesus and then have people in your congregation talking about their own experience of faith.

You may have a stall for your church, where you can hand out materials about different ministries and things the church is involved in. You may also ask people to do a quick quiz to enter a draw for a prize or give them something small, like a Mintie. On the quiz, you could ask how they heard about the event, if there is anything that the parish can be praying for, or if there are any ministries that they are interested in (including hearing more about Jesus) - if they respond yes to being interested they can fill in their contact details. You should ensure that someone contacts them the following week to chat or provide more information.

You will need to ensure that Work Health and Safety is adhered to and that you meet all requirements of your diocese for hosting this kind of public event. You may also need to check council regulations in your area. You will need to prepare an emergency response plan and communicate this well to people involved in the event.

If you are planning to have market stalls, you will need to encourage those inside the church to consider hosting a stall and approach local businesses and others who may be interested in participating in the event. Consider guidelines for holding a stall based on your vision for the event. If you are planning to hold the event outdoors, you will need to ensure that you have a wet weather plan. If you are selling food, you must meet your local food handling and safety guidelines.

If you sell things in church stalls, you may need to ensure that people can pay by card – many people no longer carry cash.

If you have space for children, such as craft activities, farm animals, etc., you will (as always) need to ensure that all people helping with those activities meet the safe church requirements for your diocese.

Please ensure that your team (and any subteams) has effective communication and document-sharing methods. Google Docs or another platform may help with collaboration outside designated meeting times.

Content

What a festival might look like will depend on your local context. You may choose to invite:

- Market stalls
- Food stalls
- Information stalls (local government, SES, CFA, etc.)
- Book swap stalls
- Live music
- Dance
- Kids activities (face painting, crafts, team games, rides, farm animals, costumes)
- Testimonies or a Bible talk
- Live music
- Plays
- Storytelling
- Games
- Show bags
- Cooking activities/lessons

Coordinating this type of event takes skill and time, so ensure your team has time to plan. You may also choose to have a team of people praying somewhere during the event as it proceeds.

Communication

Communication is vital when hosting this kind of event. Good communication within your organising team will ensure that everything is done well and that people have the relevant information to move ahead with their plans.

You will need to communicate well with your church community. What are you asking them to do? What are you asking them to pray for? Are there people in your parish who can help with communication? What needs to be in the parish pew sheet or the notices? Do your community need flyers to give to friends and family to invite them to come along? Is this up on your parish website and social media pages?

Communication with your wider community is also vitally important. If you want people from your community to attend and be involved, you should approach people who might hold a stall and ask them to share the festival in their networks. You can also do this with any local businesses you invite to participate. You may also choose to do a letterbox drop (remember to respect “no junk mail” stickers), boost social media posts, put up some posters or banners, or take out an ad in the local paper (if this is for a significant church event you may be able to convince a local paper to run a story and not need to pay for an ad).

The bottom line is that good communication with your team is essential to achieving a good result. You also need to communicate more broadly if you want people to come.

Problem-Solving

What if...

The more complex an event is, the greater the possibility of something going wrong. Most things that go wrong are likely small - a volunteer being sick and unable to attend, for example. Some problems have more significant consequences, but most can easily be solved. Only some possible issues can be covered here, but these are a few that are just worth consideration.

You will need to have trained first aiders available for the event, with a good first aid kit. If your festival is very large, you may choose to have a dedicated stall. Otherwise, ensure that stall holders all have a phone number for the first aiders and have them wear something that makes them identifiable.

If you are planning to hold the event outdoors, you will need to ensure that you have a viable wet weather plan (and perhaps that it is written on any flyers so that people know that the event will still be on if it rains). This could be moving all or part of the festival indoors. With some activities, it will be easier to move than others, so think about what is going to work best for you. Different areas of Australia will have more or less chance of rain at this time of year, so consider what is best for your location.

If you encounter a very hot day for the time of year, you might want to consider having sunscreen and water available for those attending the day. If this is the case, you may choose to have them at a first aid station. This will also increase awareness of where first aid is located.

If you are hosting your festival on a Saturday, remember that 2025 is an election year and that an election will take place before September. While the chances of a clash are low and may have some benefits if you are not far from a polling station, people will need to be able to go and vote, and those who work at polling stations may be unavailable.

Two other key issues might be a child getting lost, in which case ensure that you have child-safe people visible and able to look after the child. Consider how you will reunite the child with their parents if this happens. If the child knows the phone number, it can be easy. Taking them to the first aid area can also help them be easier to find. The other key, serious issue may be threatening or violent behaviour. In that case, you will need to ensure that you have volunteers available who can stay safe while de-escalating the issue. Do not hesitate to call the local police if needed (even better –offer them a stall).

Paths Forward

What now?

A festival can be a fun event, but keeping track of people interested in hearing more about Jesus is challenging. Consider how you might engage with people after the event. If you have a stall giving away church information, bibles, etc., that could be a place for interested people to sign up for more information on what your church does. You could also set up QR codes for people to find out about the church ministries - this can be good for those who are interested but nervous about getting into a long conversation at the time. Many people prefer to be shown a path to finding information online so that they can find information in their own time and at their own pace.

When we try new things, we change. Two key groups to consider as you chart a path forward:

Your existing congregation

Some of these people have stepped in out in faith and tried something new in their engagement with the festival. How can these people continue to be supported as disciples of Jesus? Are there things you have learned from this event that have helped identify ministries these people can move into within your parish?

Newcomers

The people who visited your church for the festival also need a path forward. Some may have indicated that they want to hear more about particular ministries (over 60's, parents groups, kids, youth, etc.), while others may have said they would be interested in learning more about who Jesus is. You will need to contact anyone who asked to be contacted. A good path forward might be to host a course, Bible study, or baptism class where people can learn more. Some options might be:

- Just for Starters
- Alpha
- Life Course
- Simply Christianity
- Christian Essentials

You will also need to put together a team to help lead each of these, so it may be a good path forward for those in your parish to continue to try new things.

Implementation Plan

Firstly	Secondly
<p data-bbox="328 383 539 412">Gather a team.</p> <p data-bbox="105 461 762 490">Choose a date, location and goal for the event.</p>	<p data-bbox="839 383 1481 412">Communicate with your parish or community.</p> <p data-bbox="855 461 1465 535">Gather people who can help with particular areas of the festival.</p> <p data-bbox="847 584 1473 658">Invite broader participation from community groups (if you choose).</p>
Thirdly	Finally
<p data-bbox="129 813 740 938">Ensure you communicate broadly and invite people to the festival through multiple channels.</p> <p data-bbox="118 987 750 1113">Continue to pray as you host the festival and share the hope we have in Jesus with your community.</p>	<p data-bbox="869 813 1450 887">Have dedicated time to following up with people from the festival.</p> <p data-bbox="847 936 1473 1010">Thank stall holders and all those who helped (inside and outside the church).</p> <p data-bbox="855 1059 1465 1133">Provide further avenues for people to learn about Jesus and grow in their faith.</p>