

How To



host a gospel outreach service



This guide will help you to plan your Hope25 event.

Purpose

A gospel outreach service gives you an opportunity within a familiar format to explain the hope we have in Jesus to guests and invite them to respond. This event could be called A Guest Service, Outreach Service, Gospel Service, Invitation Service.

Planning

Team

Planning a guest service is not a one-person job. You will need to put together a team that can help lead, plan, and pray for the service.

You will need a team that can delegate aspects of the service and consider communications around the service (internally and externally). You will want your team to include your minister/priest and two or three others. If you don't have a musician on the team, ensure that they are included early on if you plan to have music within the service. You may also choose to have a different team that is dedicated, not to the service planning, but to praying for the service. This group can pray for: invitations, logistics, planning, visitors, hospitality, the preacher, the service participants, guest responses, hospitality, and follow-up.

Before the Event

When you have gathered your team, you will need to decide:

- What date to have the service (if using the lectionary, you may choose a date that has passages of Scripture that support your theme)
- A theme for the service, for example, Hope for the... (hopeless, lost, fearful, worried, poor, guilty), ANZAC Day, King's Birthday, Families etc. - See the hope25 website for some sermon ideas.
- Bible passages that will accompany your service theme - invite your best readers to read these.
- Who will be your preacher, will you invite a guest preacher? You could also use the video sermons that will be available close to Easter on the Hope25 website.
- How will you invite guests? For example, you might use:
 - Printed invitation cards (see the Hope25 website for a downloadable card or design one)
 - Social media invitation posts
 - Emailing invitations to all parish contacts (past baptisms, weddings etc.)
 - Letterbox drop in your local area
 - Show your congregation how to invite friends
- Who will you ask to do "up front" roles? Use the best people you have for this, ensure that they are extra prepared.
- Ensure that your intercessions are well crafted and focused on community (avoid 'us' and 'them' language), avoiding jargon and topics that might be off-putting.
- How will people respond?
 - Response card in the pews/seats (see the Hope25 website for an example)
 - QR code to collect contact details
 - Gospel Course sign-up sheet
 - Invitation to a special place/room in the church after the service
- How to follow people up. What is your plan to meet and encourage guests to come along to something you are doing? Can you invite them to a "follow-up" course such as *Just for Starters* or *Christianity Explored*?

Ensure that you include the music team in your discussions. Try to find well-known or easy-to-pick-up music so that people can join in if they would like to. Depending on the musical depth of the parish, you might choose to have an item rather than as many hymns/songs as usual.

You will need to plan your guest experience. Coming to church for the first time can be intimidating, how can you create a friendly environment for people as they arrive? For example, you may consider:

- Where will people park? Is it a good idea to reserve spots for guests and/or encourage regulars not to park too close?
- How will people get into the building? Make sure that your entry is as accessible, clearly marked, clean and well kept, inviting, and logical.
- Who will welcome them? Recruit your best welcomers who are skilled at making people feel at ease.
- How will they be welcomed? There may be some food and drink to welcome people at the door. Consider having a full, printed order of service so that people do not need to find their way through unfamiliar books.
- Where will guests sit? - You may need to encourage regulars to sit towards the front so that guests can come in and take the back seats - guests will not move to sit in front of people.

- Will there be a response card or different response mechanism? Ensure that these are handed out or are in seats.
- What hospitality will you offer? It might be good to plan a special morning tea or lunch to show people you care - ensure that it is easy to get to and that it isn't easier to leave than find morning tea.
- Will you give guests anything? You could give them a Hope25 Gospel of Luke, a gospel tract, a book, or information about relevant programs that you run.
- Will there be an invitation to join a small group, or a course, or a reading group? How will people be able to respond to this invitation?

If you usually run a kids program, consider how children can be involved in the service this time. Many people who are not familiar with church might hesitate to leave their children with people they do not know. How can the service be oriented towards guests of all ages so that nobody feels excluded?

The service must be familiar enough in style to your usual gathering that existing congregation members are comfortable issuing an invitation. It should also be planned to ensure:

- The outreach/ proclamation purpose is clear, and that it is specifically designed for guests.
- The service is accessible and understandable to first-time attendees – eg there might be slightly more explanation of what we do.
- The gospel message is clearly articulated.
- There is an opportunity for people to respond to what they have heard.

If you are not using a prayer book, consider the shape of your service and shape it according to the principles of the prayer book. If you are not doing a eucharistic service then one simple possibility would be:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Song
- Testimony
- Musical Item/Drama
- Bible
- Sermon
- Response
- Song
- Intercessions
- Song
- Sending Out

However you structure your service, you will want to consider refreshments before or after the service and how you might structure an opportunity for them to respond to what they have heard. The response could come in several ways. For example, you could have prayer cards for people to fill out, a QR code to allow them to fill out a form electronically, an invitation to come to the front of the church for prayer, or you might give out some Bibles or other books with an invitation to discuss the content.

Regarding your preaching, if you are following the lectionary, you might look at the readings when choosing your service date and allow that to feed in as a factor. You might preach on a theme in the readings rather than preaching an exegetical sermon. If you are using the lectionary, then themes for the weeks following Easter within John's Gospel could be as follows:

- Easter Day: John 20: 1-18 (Luke 24:1-12) - The Hope of Resurrection
- Easter 2: John 20:19-31 - Doubt, Faith and Hope
- Easter 3: John 21:1-19 - Hope in Despair/ The Hope of Forgiveness
- Easter 4: John 10:22-30 - Hope and Belonging
- Easter 5: John 13:31-35 - Hope and Love
- Easter 6: John 14:23-29 (John 5:1-9) - Hope and Belief/Hope and the Spirit/ Hope and Peace (Hope and Healing)
- Easter 7: John 17:20-26 - Hope and Prayer/ Hope and Love
- Pentecost: John 14:8-17 (25-27) - Hope and Relationship with God

If you are not following the lectionary, here are some passages that you may choose to preach on from the Gospel of Luke:

- Hope for the Irreligious - Luke 18:9-17
- Hope for the Lost - Luke 15
- Hope for the Rejected - Luke 7:36-50
- Hope for the Guilty - Luke 23
- Hope for the Poor - Luke 18:18-30
- Hope for the Sick - Luke 5:17-26
- Hope for the Lifeless - Luke 24

In addition to preaching, welcoming people well is also crucial. Choose welcomers who are good at reading body language and can be gentle with those who wish to sneak in quietly and enthusiastic with those who want to engage people. Ensure that there are people who can help others navigate into the building from the car park. You may also need to help people to navigate the service. It can be helpful to include verbal instructions on when to sit and stand within the service and who is welcome at communion. Have your greeters also on the lookout during refreshments to ensure visitors know where to get tea, coffee, etc. It may even be helpful to gather those involved in welcoming people at an earlier date and ask them to imagine that they were coming to church for the first time. Where might they need help? Finding the entry? Finding the toilets? Working out where to sit? This imaginative exercise can help you know where people might be needed to help people find their way.

Communication

There are three key areas of communication that will be essential to hosting this event.

1. Within your team: you will need to ensure that your planning team are on the same page and are able to share any documents necessary with one another.
2. Within your parish: ensure that your parish know what is planned and are joining in prayer for the event, as well as inviting friends, family and neighbours to come to the service. You can communicate internally through parish email updates, notices during services, information in pew sheets as well as any other form of contact your parish uses.
3. With your community and invitees: it is often easier for people to invite others to an event if they have something to give to them. Consider a postcard sized information sheet as well as some information on your parish webpage. Ensure that anything you hand out has the date and time of the service as well as the church website. Depending on your context you might consider including information on car parking, kids ministry, and the general shape of the event. You might consider:
 - a. A letterbox drop in your local community
 - b. Giving cards to each member of your parish community and encouraging them to think of two people that they can pray for and invite to the service.

Problem-Solving

What if...

When hosting an event, we must always be ready for the unexpected. It may be a music team member being unwell, a guest preacher who gets COVID, the death of a key person within the parish or severe weather that means people are hesitant to leave their houses on the day. An event going differently than planned does not mean it will be a disaster. God works through imperfection and outright disaster all the time.

Where you can, ensure that you have backups available. Ask people to write down what they are doing so that it can be passed on if something happens. Ensure your technology is working, and you have a backup of any files you need for the service.

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we may look at a guest service and realise that only our usual members are in attendance. This can be disappointing, but proceed with the service as planned—you never know who in your community needs to hear this message and may respond. Talk with your community afterwards and see if you can find out what happened. It may be that a different evangelistic activity might work better for your community in the future.

Paths Forward

Paths Forward: What now?

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 out in faith and invited people to your service. Some will have said yes, and others no. Remember that it often takes multiple invitations and experiences with faith before people respond and are encouraged. Some people in your parish may have stepped out in faith to try something new: helping with music, service planning, or hospitality. How can these people continue to be supported as disciples of Jesus?

Newcomers

The people who visited your church for the service will need a path forward. Some may have responded affirmatively to the Gospel, others may not have. 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

For each of these, you will also need to put together a team to help lead, so it may be a good path forward for those in your parish to continue to try new things. Those who couldn't make the guest service might also find that one of these courses or studies better suits them.

Implementation Plan

Firstly	Secondly
<p>Choose when to have your service.</p> <p>Decide on the shape of the service and invite any guest preachers or others from outside your parish to participate.</p>	<p>Communicate internally and externally.</p> <p>Help people think about who they might invite and provide them with tools to invite others.</p> <p>Ensure that everything that needs doing for the service has a name next to it.</p>
Thirdly	Finally
<p>Have the service.</p> <p>Deal with any issues that come up with care and compassion, knowing that God works in our weakness.</p> <p>Be welcoming, caring and loving as you greet people.</p>	<p>Think about what happens next.</p> <p>How will you support people in their discipleship of Jesus after the guest service?</p>