

Continued from Cross Points Easter Outreach...

Free Family Carnival:

The Free Family Carnival is pretty simple and doesn't take a lot to do well. Word of Grace uses 4 basic elements: 1. Prayer; 2. Food; 3. Fun; 4. Connecting with people in a positive way.

1. Prayer

As mentioned above the whole process begins with prayer. People are encouraged to pray daily for the outreach, pray in teams, pray at worship, pray as they walk their adopted neighborhoods and continue to pray for people, by name if possible, after the event.

2. Food

Easiest and least expensive way to provide food is to barbecue, steam, or boil hot dogs. They are simple to cook, relatively inexpensive and easy to freeze the left overs for the next party.

Include paper plates, buns, condiments, chips, and drinks. The cheapest drinks are bulk powdered drinks like Crystal Light or Country Time. You can also offer iced tea and water. Make sure to offer sugar free drinks for people who don't or can't drink sugar. You can ask people to sign up to bring the food needed, or ask the congregation to help cover the cost through a special offering or fund it through your budget.

3. Fun

Games: Three to Five games is all you need. Just make sure everyone who plays is a winner!

Ring Toss (Sheet of ply board with nails or screws spaced across the board and plastic rings, available at most party stores or oriental trading co., to toss and try to hang a ring on a nail.)

Bean Bag Toss (Set up a bucket and try to toss the bean bag into the bucket)

Fishing Game (Set up a sheet with a volunteer hiding behind it. Participant puts fishing pole with clothespin on the end of a 4ft line over the sheet and the volunteer clips a prize to the line and gently tugs. Kids love this game! A good prize for this game is a punchy balloon.)

Balloon Pop (staple or tape air filled balloons on a blanket or board and allow participants to throw darts to pop the balloons)

Football Toss (Set up a tire and let participants try to throw a football through the tire.)

Bottle Toss (Set up empty 2 liter soda bottles, with a little sand in the bottom, on a board and let participants try to knock them over.)

Use your imagination (there are almost limitless ideas, use your imagination and come up with games that are simple to set up and simple to play.)

Prizes: You can get little cheap prizes at any party store or at orientaltrading.com. Buy in bulk more prizes than you think you will need. Have fun and be generous!

Jumpy Castle: Rent one or two jumpy castles. Kids of all ages love jumpy castles, they are bright, fun and give your carnival a real boost.

4. Connect with People

Set up an “Information Booth” with printed material about your congregation, inviting guests to your Easter service. Staff the info booth with a friendly person who will represent your congregation with a smile. The pastor should be a rover who wanders around connecting with guests and practicing friendly conversation.

Greeters: Have 2 or 3 of your friendliest people mingle with your community guests and engage them in conversation. It’s pretty easy to train your friendliest people to start conversations with guests. Train them to smile, greet people with a handshake, introduce themselves (Hi, I’m Bob from _____ church, how are you doing today? Are you having fun? Is there anything I can get you? How long have you folks lived in the community? Etc. Simple conversation, asking questions about the people shows you care.

Train the people managing the games to be friendly, helpful and loving toward the children and parents who will play your games.

Have Fun! Enjoy people, listen to them, make them feel important and special because they are. These are people God has brought to you. Treat them with the dignity of people created in the image of God and as people for whom Christ lived, died and rose again to redeem. You don’t have to have an aggressive evangelism presentation. You can put your people at ease by telling them they don’t have to evangelize people at the party. You simply want to connect with people in a positive way, begin to develop relationships with the community. Jesus is already at work in the hearts and minds of your neighbors, you don’t have to force evangelism. Just focus on making friends of your community and God will provide opportunities to talk about faith as your relationships and trust with the community grow over time. This isn’t the last party your congregation is going to throw. Hopefully you and your people will learn that it’s fun to connect and you will begin to throw regular parties for your community to connect with you, and with Jesus through you in positive ways.

Easter Sunday

Now that you’ve connected with your community and invited them to Easter, keep them in prayer asking God to move in their hearts and to bring people to your service at Easter. On the Saturday of Holy Week send your neighborhood teams back out into their adopted neighborhoods with door hangers inviting people to join you for Easter worship.

Have a potluck for the community after Easter worship. Get outside if you can and invite your neighbors. Celebrate our Lord’s Resurrection with your community. After all, it is an exciting event we are celebrating. Jesus is Risen, He is Risen Indeed, Hallelujah! Share that celebration with your neighbors. Your neighbors are pretty much the reason Jesus lived, died and rose again so he could redeem them from slavery to sin, death and the devil.

Word of Grace regularly gathers about 200 people from their community to the Free Family Carnival on Palm Sunday. Of the hundreds that come a handful always join them for Easter. Many of the handful that join them for Easter connect with the congregation and Jesus and become part of the life of their

congregation. Those who were de-churched reconfirm their faith and baptism, those who were unchurched come to faith, baptism and discipleship. Last year Word of Grace baptized 25 adults who connected with Jesus through the Free Family Carnivals and parties Word of Grace throws throughout the year.

Jesus wants to save and redeem your neighbors. He is already working in their lives and invites you to partner with him in the work he is already doing. Saving your neighbors, breaking the hard heart of sin and unbelief is Jesus' job. Only he can change the heart of your neighbors and save them. He is already at work in their lives, all you have to do is provide opportunities for Jesus to connect with people through you and your congregation. One of the best ways to do that is by throwing a party. Matthew followed Jesus and took Jesus home to what looks like a small party of his friends, sinners and tax collectors some of these people followed Jesus.

How to evaluate your outreach: Good, Better, Best

1. Good: Does our outreach make a difference? Did we serve someone who needed to be served? Did we bring joy to someone who needed joy? Did we have fun?
2. Better: Did we make a difference **AND** does it help develop relationships with un-churched people? The goal of our outreach is to develop relationships with people. People in our communities need between 7 and 12 positive interactions with you before they will trust you. Statistics tell us that a healthy, growing congregation needs to do a minimum of one small outreach to the community per month plus one larger outreach each quarter.
3. Best: Did we make a difference **AND** did we help develop relationships with un-churched people **AND** did we end up making a disciple? **Good** is a good place to start, if we can do **Better** that's great, but it's the **Best** that we are ultimately aiming for over time. The ultimate goal or our outreach is to connect with people so we can connect people to Jesus and lead those we connect to following Jesus as disciples. Start with trying to do good, then each time you step out and serve your community watch as Jesus leads you and your people on to the Best, seeing the fruit of your labor through people coming to faith, baptism and discipleship in your congregation!

Remember to have fun. Jesus enjoyed people and he gives us permission to enjoy people and have fun doing it. Have fun and watch how much trust develops between you and your community, then watch as trust develops into friendship and friendships lead the way to people coming to faith. Evangelism and outreach can actually be fun and rewarding. Try it and see.

A great Lutheran resource to help you with outreach is Greg Finke's new book: "Joining Jesus on His Mission." Available at www.dwelling114.org, Amazon.com or books.google.com/books?isbn=1938840038