

Read What You Need

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◆ **A True Story Of How An Outreach Event Can Be A Positive Influence In A Person's Life**, p 2.

◆ **Christ's Method, Our Example** features a quotation from the *Ministry of Healing* and is illustrated in Phillip's story, p 3.

◆ **Survey Your City** gathers demographic information for your area so you can plan a relevant outreach event, p 3.

◆ **Set Your Six Weeks of Small Groups' Dates** sets in motion the planning for successful outreach events, p 4.

◆ **Outreach Events** describes the goals and how to plan for effective outreach events, p 5.

◆ **Friendship Day** builds on the relational foundations of the outreach event, p 6.

◆ **Collaborative Planning** is an expanding planning process incorporating the ideas of increasingly more people, which results in a surge in attendance and higher quality events, p 7.

◆ **The Congregation as Hosts** at the outreach events is one of the many benefits of following the Collaborative Planning process, p 8.

◆ **The Collaborative Planning process graphic** is a visual illustration of the process flow and how more people are added into the planning, p 9

◆ **Motivated By Love**—the outreach events are simply an expression of our love for our Lord Jesus. We love our neighbors because He first loved us, p 10.

How to Plan a Fruitful Outreach Event

Philip's stomach signaled his uneasiness as he drove to the worship facility with his girlfriend, Pilar. Some weeks earlier, she had invited Philip to an outreach event referred to as the Fall Party. Considering his past negative experiences with Christian groups, his decision to attend the event was completely out of love for Pilar and a desire to please her.

Philip's thoughts drifted back to a regrettable encounter with a Christian group that had left him feeling as though all Christian groups were more concerned with converting rather than caring about him. Their demanding and pushy assault wrote a lifetime message in his memory to beware of those kinds of groups in the future.

Pilar's accolades of last year's Fall Party were sidelined by Philip's thoughts of just getting through it. His focus steeled him for the anticipated moment when the pastor along with one or two others would accompany him to a secluded room to urge him to surrender to Jesus and join the fellowship right on the spot.

What happened changed Philip's mind and initiated a rewrite of Christian groups. Philip felt a genuine welcome from friendly people. He participated in the activities and simply enjoyed the evening with Pilar and the gathered congregation. He ate the food, played volleyball and joined in the chalk art contest without feeling self conscious.

When the party ended he was both pleased and surprised that no one asked him to go into a room for a one on one. Neither did any one put him on the spot by their excessive attention. As a result of his pleasant experience at the Fall Party, he agreed to attend the Friendship Sabbath a few weeks later.

In God's time, Philip was baptized and joined the congregation. He and Pilar were married. Now, when the church gathers for worship, he is part of the greeting team passing along the kindness he felt at his first introduction to the friendly church. In addition, he sings with the Praise Band. If this sounds too good to be true remember, "With God all things are possible." [text]

Christ's Example, Our Method

Christ ministered to people's needs before inviting them to follow Him. Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me." (Ministry of Healing, 143)

Phillip's story illustrates how a congregation can introduce itself to a guest in a positive manner through an outreach event. In the quotation above, we read, "Christ ministered to their needs, and won their confidence." During the outreach event, Phillip's greatest need was the assurance no one would take him aside to urge him to get right with Jesus. Assurances arrived as caring folks encouraged Phillip to experience the evening's activities at his own pace and without any "manipulative monologue" (See *Making Friends for God*, Mark Finley, p 2-3).

In addition, Pilar's invitation to Phillip was bathed in her daily prayers as well as the prayers of her small group. Praying for God's timing and influence is the first step in preparing to invite your friend to an outreach event. When considering who to place on your prayer list of potential names to invite, an accepted premise of evangelism is that a majority of people come into the Adventist Church through friends, neighbors and relatives.

Survey Your City

Begin the outreach planning by visiting your city's website to better understand the demographic make-up of those who live around your worship facility. On your city's website, for example, search for the residents' median age; whether most families include two parents or one and lots more helpful information. Your purpose is to learn about those who live near your worship facility. If you're interested in a more in-depth study of your community, contact Monte Sahlin at montesahlin@gmail.com.

Demographic information is a starting point to help think about the kinds of outreach events you might plan. If your community includes many young families the outreach events should include children. If the worship facility is near a retirement community the outreach events should be of interest to senior folks.

Memorable outreach events are well planned and flow with just the right amount of balance. If the event is too long families will tire and leave. If you plan them too frequently, your church will tire-out. Pace your outreach events to encourage a good attendance and allow rest for the congregation. Establish a reputation in your community and congregation for sponsoring relational and family friendly events. At the conclusion of your outreach, you want the guests looking forward to your next event and perhaps thinking of a family they might invite.

Withstand, with all your might, the temptation to attempt the ultimate outreach event by pulling out all the stops and spending way over budget. Making friends takes time so it's better to have several well planned and attended events than one big one. Also, resist the temptation to pay for a mass mailing to all the neighbors. Your outreach event is relational and merits a personal invitation.

Set Your 6 Weeks of Small Group's Dates

The pastor and the small groups' coordinator usually establishes a yearly calendar of two sessions of 6 Weeks of Small Groups. The fall and winter months seems to enhance the small groups' attendance since the sun goes down earlier eliminating competing options for people's time. Typically, the 6 Weeks of Small Groups opens with a Precession Day and concludes with a Celebration Sabbath resulting in an eight weeks' block. (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1

Since each of the 6 Weeks of Small Groups' sessions require 8 weeks, two small groups' sessions require 1/3 of the yearly calendar or 4 months. If adequately

planned and conducted, the loving, friendly sense of community experienced in the small groups' gatherings has a leaving affect on Sabbath as they interact with guests and the congregation.

Below we'll explore Outreach events and Friendship Day. In the chapter *Start a Small Group* are the discussion of the 6 Weeks of Small Groups along with the Precession Day and Celebration Sabbath.

Outreach Events

During the 6 Weeks of Small Groups' sessions, there are two outreach events.

The first outreach event is an occasion for both the congregation and the community to make new friends in a social setting at their own pace as illustrated in the story of Phillip. Adventists have introduced themselves to local residents through seed sowing events like cooking classes, health clinics and stress reduction seminars over the years. Outreach events similarly introduce Adventists to their communities.

The goal is to create outreach events that are non-threatening and include enjoyable activities so the congregation will happily invite their acquaints to join in on the fun.

The outreach event might be held at a park, beach, fellowship hall and even the worship facility's parking lot. Chose a location that is easily accessible to guests allowing them to come and go as they desire.

Follow your research so your activities are relevant to those near your worship facility and are appropriate for your invited guests. If you are near young families, plan events that includes family games involving all ages.

As an example, offer a fall party for kids and families in place of Halloween. Serve kid friendly food and play games for all ages to add to the festivities. Offer group activities that encourages parents and kids as well as adults, guests and teenagers to team-up. Decide on activities that both the guests and the congregation will enjoy. Your goal is an interactive event.

Guests may anticipate a prayer and maybe a song or two to begin the event. However, your first outreach event should not include any formal Bible presentations. You will share the gospel at your second outreach event. At your first outreach event, the guests' expectations are more inline with tasting the food and perhaps participating in an activity. Jesus won the peoples' confidence first, then invited them to "Follow Me." Let's follow the Lord's lead.

Include in the activities those talents your church does well. For example, if your congregation sings or plays instruments include those in your planning. Invite a friendly, outgoing personality from your congregation to be the master of ceremony.

With the community in mind, chose an event name that's immediately recognizable and implies wholesome fun. For example, you might adopt the familiar nomenclature "party" with a title like "Fall Party" or "Beach Party." Always keep in mind the needs of your congregation and the community.

At an outreach event, guests are introduced on a one-to-one basis and not an embarrassing, "stand up and meet the whole crowd all at once" approach. The expectations for the guests and the congregation are to join in the activities and enjoy the event together. A welcoming atmosphere allows the guests as well as the congregation to relax and naturally open their hearts to making new friends.

Friendship Day

The second outreach event planned during the Six Weeks of Small Groups is Friendship Day. Friendliness and a loving smile are enhanced when the worship facility is maintained in an attractive manner. (See Joe Kidder's article, "Moments of Decision," *Ministry*, October, 2013)

Friendship Day is the opportunity for the small groups and the congregation to invite their friends, neighbors and family members to a Sabbath service. Friendship Day follows the first outreach event within the Six Weeks of Small Groups' timeframe. For the guests, the first outreach event is like going on a blind date. They, no doubt, have some preconceived ideas about Adventists but are willing to find out for themselves.

Like Phillip's story, if the congregation appears friendly, transparent and natural at the outreach event, the guest's heart may be open to saying yes when invited to attend Friendship Day.

On Friendship Day, the guests are welcomed in a general fashion but no one is asked to stand or raise a hand to identify themselves. As an act of appreciation for attending Friendship Day, give a small gift to the guests at the conclusion of the service.

The pastor or person responsible for the Friendship Day sermon should prayerfully consider the message. The message should be prepared especially for the guests. In Ellen White's book, *Steps to Christ*, the first chapter on God's Love for Man is a helpful theme to share, for example.

In place of a fellowship luncheon at the worship facility, why not invite your guests home for lunch following the service? This is also a great opportunity for small groups to collectively share lunch with their guests at a park or home. For those guests unable to accept a luncheon invitation, plan to serve light refreshments following the service as a brief time of fellowship.

Collaborative Planning

Collaborative planning to plan and implement the outreach events is a Holy Spirit led process. In place of a few individuals planning an event, groups of people progressively offer their ideas and suggestions. The intentional process aims at assuring an appealing outreach event with a maximum attendance.

Collaborative Planning will significantly increase the quality of your events as well as surge the attendance. In place of four or eight people on the evangelistic committee deciding the event, think of the impact you will have by including *everyone* in your small groups. Collaborative planning is a simple method that can be reproduced in your field.

First, the Collaborative Planning begins with either the pastor, local elder, small group coordinator, or any combination setting the dates for the Six Weeks of Small Groups as discussed above.

Second, the pastor, local elder, small groups' coordinator, or any combination, contact the small group facilitators to meet with them and discuss the outreach events. Their tasks include deciding the specific dates, times, locations and themes of the outreach event.

Third, once the outreach events are defined, the information is written into the small group curriculum and is shared during the small group sessions. Like a living organism, the number of those helping to plan the outreach event purposely grows as the small groups refine and complete the planning process. Guided by the Holy Spirit the outreach events are improved and refined down to the smallest detail.

As an example, small groups consider which foods best match the event's theme. They decide who will set up, and clean up after the event. Most importantly, the small groups unite with the pastor, elder, small group coordinators and facilitators by inviting their friends, family and neighbors to the outreach event. Their involvement models to the congregation how a follower of Jesus assumes ownership of an outreach event.

The Congregation as Hosts

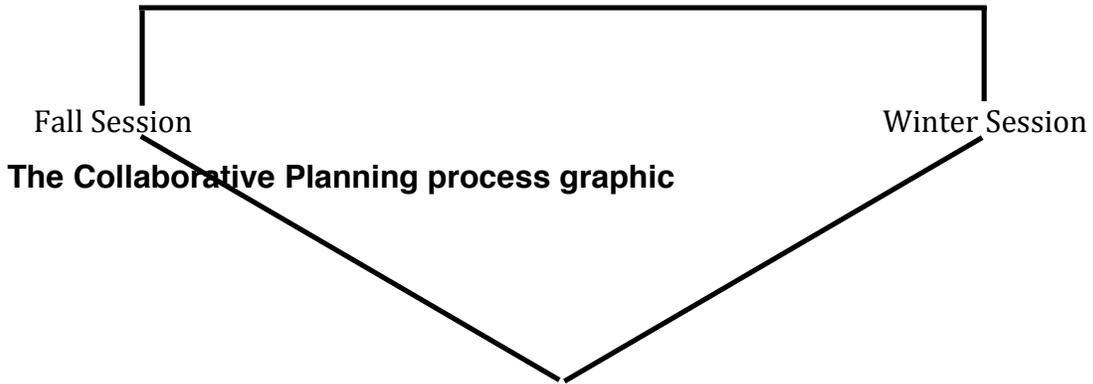
Through the Collaborative Planning process, the congregation takes on the role of hosts. They see to the needs of the guests and interact with them naturally over the course of the event. They extend a warm welcome to all the guests they meet, not merely the ones they brought. Just as if the outreach event were a dinner party in a home, the hosts interact with all the guests.

Discussing the roles of hosts may sound elementary, but we live in a culture that is quickly forgetting the basics of social etiquette. The outreach event is an opportunity for the congregation to open their hearts to the guests as much as it is for the guests to become acquainted with the congregation.

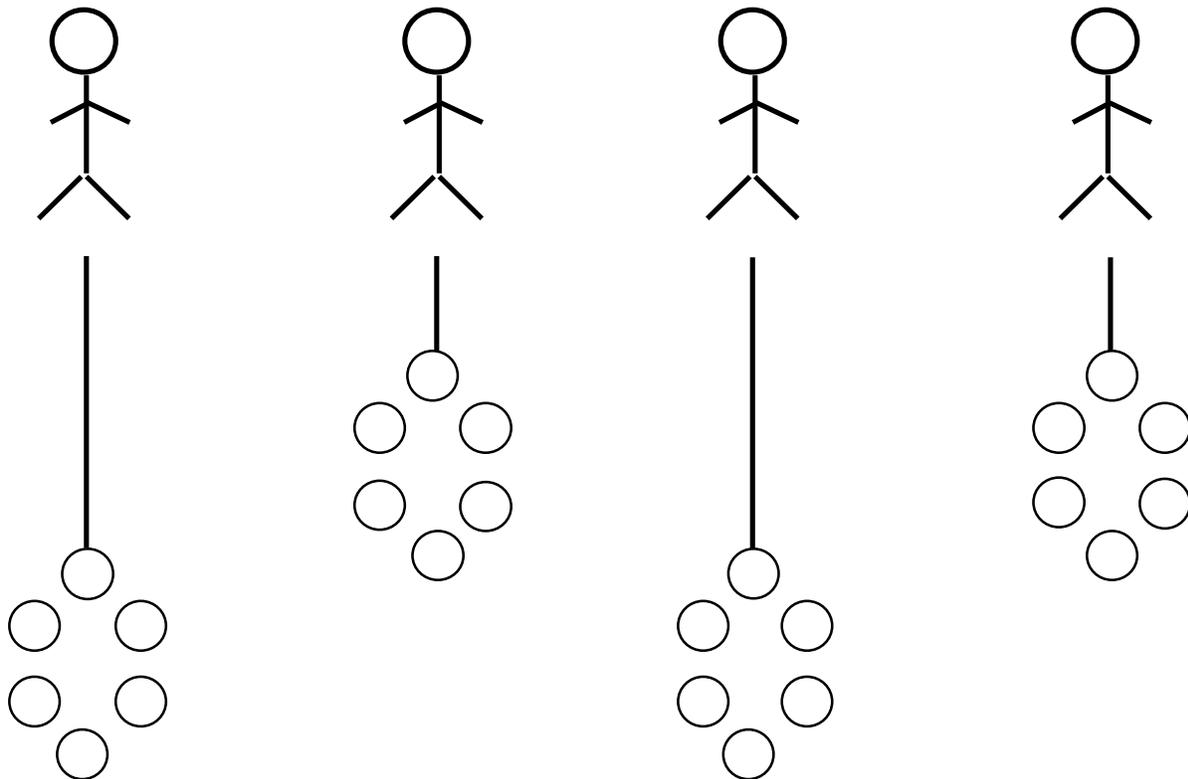
The graphic below illustrates how the collaborative planning process multiplies the individuals helping to plan the outreach event. The planning begins with the pastor and small group coordinator and moves on to include, in the illustration below, four small group facilitators. The small group facilitators share the

outreach plans with their small groups who are invited to refine and complete the planning process.

Pastor and Small Group Coordinators set calendar dates for two sessions of Six Weeks of Small Groups



The Pastor and Small Group Coordinators meet with the Small Group Facilitators to shape the day and time of the outreach events, as well as the theme and activities.



The Small Group facilitators share the outreach plans with their groups. The planning process is refined by the small groups who decide which foods to bring and activities to play, as well as who will set up, and clean up after the event.

The preceding graphic illustrates the exponential growth of the collaborative planning process. The number of those planning and preparing for the outreach event multiplied from two individuals, the pastor and the small group coordinator, to 28 individuals, the small group facilitators and their combined small groups. That increases the planning team? by a factor of 14. The old adage, “the more the merrier,” translates into increased attendance and personal ownership of the event.

Motivated By Love

Our Lord commands us to, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). Loving our neighbors begins with getting acquainted with them. Loving our neighbors implies desiring the best for them and not something *from* them--like joining the church. While we desire others to know the Lord, that decision is completely theirs to make--in their time, if at all. The well known picture of Jesus knocking on a door that has no doorknob illustrates the Lord’s loving patience for the individual to respond. The outreach event is simply an expression of our love for our neighbors and, yes, we want them to know the Lord. However, we must be patient and wait until they open their hearts to Jesus.

Once guests feel welcomed and realize there are no expectations of them, they can relax and experience the congregation as ordinary people like themselves. Spirit-led outreach events open the way for the congregation to invite their friends, neighbors and relatives to a special Sabbath service like a Friendship Day which is discussed below.

On balance, there are instances when the congregation does everything perfectly right and the outreach event is a planning success, but the guests choose to direct their lives along another path. At the least, the congregation has made new friends who may respond differently in the future. All outcomes are left in God’s hands, for it’s the Holy Spirit who draws men to Himself.

We will have more to say about how the congregation learns to be more welcoming and inviting in a later chapter. (“Why We Need to Know Names”)
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