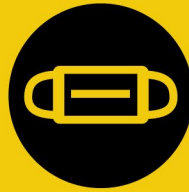


PANDEMIC PROOF

Easter



Proactive strategies for
your best year yet.

In 2020 many churches were taken by surprise. The Easter season's onset was assaulted by a global pandemic, leaving most churches scrambling to react to the biggest change in ministry strategy that many had ever faced. Instead of planning a successful Easter weekend, church leaders scrambled to assemble some semblance of a traditional Easter in entirely new formats. Many went to online-only services. Others suffered steep attendance declines. What was anticipated as an opportunity for growth and celebration became a season of frustration and unmet expectations.

This year will be different.

We've learned a lot. Churches have had a year to pivot, to determine what works, what doesn't, and what's needed. While the process has been painful, God has used it as an opportunity to reveal his will for his Body.

This guide has been created to distill your church's best strategies to plan an Easter season with a proactive approach that will reach more people and bless your community.

For more resources on how to be and do church with fresh approaches for a new season, visit ministry.acst.com.

Out with the Old. In with the New.

The first old thing you need to let go of when planning for Easter 2021 are old expectations. Things have changed. Having 100% of your church, plus visitors, attend a gigantic Easter celebration in-person, at the same time, probably isn't going to happen. You probably don't even want it to happen.

The idea of everyone "coming" to an Easter service should be replaced with an idea of everyone being "involved."

Another antiquated approach is anything related to high-touch activities. This could include standing in long lines for child check-in, crafts, food and beverage stations, handshake greetings, communion, collections, and so on. We've all learned about social distancing protocols by now. It doesn't mean you don't make room for people to interact if your church chooses to support more in-person activities. It just means that you can't rely on some of the tried and true methods for accumulating crowds.

Take an egg hunt for example. If you want, you could still do one. But care should be taken in the handling of eggs (can someone say, "food handling gloves"?). And instead of grouping eggs all together for chaotic searching, they should be spread out over a larger area to help keep kids from clustering.

"At the event" thinking should be replaced with "during the event" thinking. That means you don't hold out the best stuff for people who come in person, but instead offer the best stuff in a way that everyone can participate from where they are. You might have different expressions of the service for people online than for in-person, but your main offering should be accessible during the event for all participants.

However you decide to approach Easter at your church, it starts with learning from 2020 to discover what won't work in 2021 that used to work in 2019. Then replace and revitalize approaches in a versatile way to become effective across multiple mediums.

Replacing what's effective with what isn't is not a betrayal of tradition; it's innovating for the Kingdom's advancement.



Be True to Yourself

Your church needs to make a unique impression on your community. This is true at any time, but especially poignant in the present. You have been gifted and graced with what you need to fulfill your unique role. Don't try to be like the church down the street. Stop thinking about what you "ought" to do and start thinking about what you're called to do. This will involve praying and brainstorming with your team to distill your ideas into a simple, attainable goal for the Easter season. If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that you shouldn't just respond and react in haste. Instead, be proactive in discovering what you can offer to your community that's unique to you.

God is calling you to something that nobody else can do.



A Hybrid Approach

One of the biggest challenges of the “new normal” is figuring out how to serve both in-person and online participants. Not everything translates through a digital screen. And not everyone wants to stay home. How can your church meet the needs of both?

Taking a hybrid approach means you’ll have to do two things well: (1) determine what core elements must be available to both online and in-person attendees; (2) offer unique touches to consider the difference between engaging with your service in those two different formats.

Example: Let’s say you’ve mapped out a service that includes morning coffee and a personal greeting followed by worship and a message. You also want new people to fill out a connection card in response to an invitation to put their faith in Christ or some other response to the message. The worship and the message could be the same for the online and in-person audience. Remember to speak to both audiences, but other than that, the material is the same. However, for the morning coffee and greeting, you would have individually poured coffee cups for the in-person attendees, and maybe offer \$5 gift cards to online attendees - “coffee on us”. Likewise, the in-person attendees could grab a connection card from under their seat, while the online participants should be sent a link to an online form they can fill out. Similarly, you’d have greeters stationed at your door, but also a dedicated team of online “greeters” welcoming people to the online service in the comments section of your livestream.

The main thing to remember is that you’re reaching people in different formats with the same or similar experience and you don’t want to leave anyone out just because you didn’t take the time to think through how you would adapt things for both. Why? Because you want to be together, connected, and heading in the same direction. The direction God is leading you.

Accommodating all audiences is a necessity, not a nicety.



Think Smaller and Bigger

It's not enough to simply offer two versions of the same thing. Online viewers watching alone are isolated. In-person attendees in vacuous spaces feel like many have abandoned them. Both groups feel disconnected from each other, wondering where everyone else is.

It could be that your entire church is engaged with your Easter service, and at the same time everyone feels like only a few people are.

To combat the disconnect between online and in-person activities, it's important to do two things: (1) highlight the presence of each viewing space to the other by acknowledging their participation; (2) help those viewing online to gather together in smaller venues that allow them to be connected with other congregants.

We've created a guide called Hybrid Church that speaks to the details of how to create multi-faceted experiences to meet all the demands of your continually changing community. We've also created a guide called Livestream with A Quaranteam that shows how to create small groups for better engagement with online services. The main point...

Multiple groupings of smaller venues can actually serve overall larger audiences.





5 Steps

for a Better Easter

The following strategies can be engineered in ways that meet online or in-person participants' demands, or both. Some items in these overall strategies might only apply to either audience, but taken as a whole, they make up a sound collection of ideas to help your church create a proactive, pandemic-proof Easter.



1: Inviting

Promoting Your Easter Service

New people will attend churches in your community online and in person. You know this. But what are you doing to make the decision to attend and watch your service clear and easy?

The first step in inviting people to your Easter service is to have a unique offering on Easter Sunday.

That might be a new message series, a sunrise service, a special event, an egg hunt, or some appealing liturgical aspects (studies show millennials are increasingly drawn to liturgy). Once you know that God will be using your church in a unique way, then don't be shy about getting the word out!

1: Inviting

Promoting Your
Easter Service



Mobilize Your People

The tried and true - and still most effective - way of growing your church is through personal invites. When people's lives are changed at your church, they want to invite their friends and family. Their friends and family see the change, and it validates your church. Whether or not people are seeing the transformation, there are still ways you can get your people to invite visitors this Easter.

Ideas to Consider:

- Create an invitation card and make sure everyone in your church has a few to invite their neighbors or co-workers for the four weeks leading up to Easter.
- Preach on evangelism and the need to share the Gospel (Romans 10:14).
- Create a sign in your lobby and a banner on your website that list reasons why people should invite their friends.
- Make "canned" content that your people can share in texts, emails, and social media to invite people to your online services.
- Have a special page on your website dedicated to Easter with an easy link to share.
- Put a sign or banner out in front of your church inviting people (include times).

1: Inviting

Promoting Your
Easter Service



Leverage Social Media

Facebook Ads are a super simple and easy way to create a buzz. Follow their suggestions for boosting a post or creating an ad, invest a couple of hundred dollars, and watch people start attending your event. Give people reasons to respond with “going,” like offering a free gift to a random person or offering some sort of cool resource.

Instagram Stories are another great way to leverage social media. By creating interesting stories, allow your followers an opportunity to engage in and share the conversation.

Ideas to Consider:

- Once people have indicated they are attending your Facebook Event, keep posting cool content and teasers to keep them engaged and sure to come.
- Use questions and polls on social media to get your people talking and sharing posts.
- Define your audience as specifically as possible while still reaching the most people on Facebook Ads.
- Using images and pictures for ads that have less text and more genuine appeal is key.
- Have your people share your posts and make posts with the content you provide.

1: Inviting

Promoting Your Easter Service



Update Your Homepage

For 4 to 6 weeks leading up to Easter, you should have a big, bold banner on your church homepage with Easter event details and an option to “Plan Your Visit.” This link/button could lead to a simple webpage with event details, what to expect, and a contact form. It’s a great way to help people through a new church experience’s awkwardness and capture their information for easier follow-up later.

Ideas to Consider:

- Create a banner across your entire homepage that appears above the fold on desktop and mobile devices - front and center.
- Help people plan their visit online or in person by making general information about parking, kids, attire, streaming links, and service flow easily accessible.
- Display pictures of your church’s entrance and lobby so people feel like they already know where they are going when they arrive.
- Differentiate between the two main options of worship experience and what each entails.
- Include links to online kids programming for families who choose to watch the livestream.

1: Inviting

Promoting Your
Easter Service



Reach Out

Help people get acquainted with your church before the big Sunday by doing an outreach or service project a few weeks before Easter. This will help others in your community foster name recognition and allow you to meet more people you can invite. Always consider how to do outreach and service projects with safety and concern in mind.

Ideas to Consider:

- Simple and easy street evangelism, like handing out invitations, puts you in front of a lot of people.
- Serving a particular institution (school, shelter, etc.) will help you get to know people in the community who could benefit from a church home.
- Always include information about your Easter service while serving so people looking for a church will never have to guess where they can find one.



2: Growth

Retaining & Following Up With Visitors

Now that people are showing up and tuning in to your church, what will you do with them? First, be okay with the truth that most people who join you for Easter are not likely to stay connected. Don't take it personally; it's not you. It's simply because they only ever attend church a few times a year. But, if and when they respond to God's prompting to come back because you followed up well - whether it's the next week or the next year - you have a better chance that they'll find belonging with you.

2: Growth

Retaining & Following
Up With Visitors



Capturing Contact Info

The old-fashioned Connection Card still has merits but only if people can easily find and access it. However, with low-contact preferences you might want to have card stations instead of handouts. And of course, an online contact card for in-person attendees who don't want to handle them, and online attendees who only have that option. The key to getting someone to fill one out is to offer an incentive: a free gift, a promised response, or a next step they can take by indicating on the card. If people are sufficiently moved to connect, they will fill one out. But, if they aren't sufficiently motivated, there are other ways to get contact information.

Ideas to Consider:

- Capture parent contact information when kids check in, then follow up with what you'll be doing in your kid's ministry the following week.
- For online kids programming, ask them a question with an online form about what they might like to see in future weeks.
- Have your people take an online poll or survey on their mobile devices as an aspect of the service, right during the service. Get creative!
- Do a prize giveaway where people have to enter their email to claim their prize.
- Equip your greeting team to be able to capture people's contact info on the fly.
- Offer a free class or resource to help in a particular area of their life that will require follow-up; something like a marriage encounter class or financial peace seminar.

2: Growth

Retaining & Following
Up With Visitors



Give Visitors a Gift

People love getting stuff. But no one values junky, free SWAG. People really want something nice that shows you care and took the time to give them something special. By offering a more expensive gift, you can elevate your “ask.” If your gift is good enough, every person who joins your church for the first time will fill out a card to receive their awesome gift.

Ideas to Consider:

- Don't give them something they would buy for themselves without a thought.
- Include subtle church branding on the item so they can remember where they got it but not so ostentatious that they'd be embarrassed to bring it in public.
- If you give away apparel, use a cool design on the front, not your giant-sized logo.
- Gift ideas (all high quality): insulated water flasks, travel/work bags, earphones, gift cards, t-shirt, hoodie, car phone cradle/charger, mobile phone case (have a variety with your logo and URL printed on them), or even a digital resource.

2: Growth

Retaining & Following
Up With Visitors



Give Them a Task

Once you have their contact information, a great way to keep visitors engaged is to follow up with a request for help. People like responding to help. To get people helping and gather valuable information, you should consider creating an online Visitor Survey and sending the link to everyone who attends. As part of your follow-up process, simply let them know you want to keep doing the best with what God has given you, and to do that you need their help to provide honest feedback. Send them the link and see what happens!

Ideas to Consider:

- Don't hide the survey link in a big general follow-up email. Send it separately for a clear call to action.
- Keep the survey simple - no more than 6 questions.
- Ask questions you really want answers to; it's a win-win.
- Let people know you appreciated their feedback, and maybe even offer another gift that they have to come back to church to claim.

2: Growth

Retaining & Following
Up With Visitors



Create a Follow-Up Pathway

Following up is not a one-and-done proposition. Your follow-up process should meander through a predefined path that involves multiple people on your team. For example, after filling out a connection card, a visitor might receive a “Thanks for worshipping with us” email, then a Visitor Survey request, then a personal message from the pastor, priest or team leader, then a two-week follow-up about a new message or event, followed by a message from the children’s director about some kid-related stuff, then a link to a resource or valuable information on your website, then a request to “like” or “follow” on social media; all spaced out over an appropriate amount of time, using language that is natural and friendly.

The key is to make a very calculated response feel conversational and genuine. And the truth is, it is genuine. But it’s also automated so you can be genuinely welcoming to many more people in a more excellent way.

Ideas to Consider:

- Utilize a whole team. Don’t let all your follow-up originate from the same person or it will feel spammy and overdone.
- Deliver information to visitors from the people who are most well-associated with it in your church.
- Use an online follow-up system to automate as many of the responses as possible.
- Don’t automate everything; personal touch is still touching.
- Think ahead to what things you can invite people to for two, three, and even four weeks out. Then assemble a general email or text list for future invites.



3: Giving

Making an Offering Request

Some people don't like talking about money when a lot of guests are joining. Those people don't understand the nature of giving. To give is a blessing. If we believe that, why not ask people to be blessed through their giving. Don't let other people's mishandling of the money talk discourage you from being a blessing and being blessed.

3: Giving

Making an Offering Request



Consider Your Guests

If people come to church on Easter, they have some kind of religious bone in their body, which means they also understand the nature of giving to charity. But nothing turns people off like a shameless ask for money if it's not connected to ministry's fruitfulness. Nonetheless, they joined you on Easter because they thought it a valuable enough place to worship. If it's worthy to worship at, it's probably worthy of giving.

Ideas to Consider:

- Help people understand that giving to the church is giving to life change.
- Share the fruitfulness of your ministry by providing testimonies of transformation.
- Invite people to be part of what God is doing in their community.
- Avoid long-winded pitches to raise a certain amount or meet a specific goal.
- Keep your invitation to give simple, confident, and Spirit-led.

3: Giving

Making an Offering Request



Remind People of Purpose

People give to vision. If you're going to ask for money, you need to remind people: (1) how God uses the church; (2) how the church will use its resources to fulfill its purpose. The following is an outline for a good giving request:

Outline to Consider:

- Describe what God has called your church to do or be in this community (your vision).
- Share a testimony or story about how the church is impacting a life or lives.
- Connect the dots between someone's donation and how that allowed the church to develop leaders/disciples/initiatives to effect change.
- Offer people an opportunity to be part of what God is doing by the giving of their resources.
- Thank every person who has prayed, given, or generally supported the vision.

3: Giving

Making an Offering Request



Make No Excuses

When you doubt yourself, others will too. You've got to believe that the money someone gives will result in the impact you're claiming. If you don't believe it, don't ask it. If you do believe it, then stand behind it. Don't let your fear of people's perceptions about money dissuade you from allowing them to be part of the eternal thing God is doing right in front of them!

Ideas to Consider:

- People came to your church or joined online to worship on Easter.
- We worship God - in part - with our giving.
- If you ask them to "stand for worship," why not ask them to "give as worship"?
- Trillions of dollars are donated to various organizations every year, meaning what you're asking is not some brand new idea that repulses people.
- Give people the opportunity to be blessed by being a blessing. Don't deprive the gift-giver of the gift of giving.



4: Kids

Convenience & Security

With a few demographic anomalies, families with kids will likely be the largest portion of visitors you see on Easter.

More than ever, parents have high standards for their kids' care and maybe even higher customer service standards. This means your kids' program - and check-in process - needs to be fast and easy while providing confidence and security. Not to mention that you actually have to have great programming for the kids during service. For online attendees, your kids' programming needs to be engaging and participatory.

Conveying a strong commitment to safety, balanced by fun and excitement, wrapped in a seamless customer experience, puts the pressure on your kids' ministry to function like an Apple store with a fraction of the resources. Fortunately, there are things you can do to meet and exceed parental expectations.

4: Kids

Convenience
& Security



Declare Your Values

Let parents know right from the start how you feel about their kids, their kids' spiritual formation, and your commitment to safety. When parents see that you have taken the first step and answered their questions before they even asked, you're already starting in the green. Plus, you put parents at ease because you've dissipated the awkwardness created by the unknown.

Ideas to Consider:

- Post signs in the child check-in area and banners on your website that outline your ministry vision, values, and commitment to safety.
- Include a handout or downloadable PDF to new parents that lists your safety protocols - like ensuring that every volunteer has passed a background check.
- Highlight what the kids will be learning in class so parents know you're experts.
- Publish all your kids' ministry info on your website so by the time they visit, they already feel like they know you and your heart for their kids.

4: Kids

Convenience
& Security



Clean up The Lines

Chances are, the parents who are checking in their kids are already feeling flustered and out of sorts by rushing to a new church and being out of their element. They also might be apprehensive about the sanitizations and social distancing policies of your church. Don't add to that frustration by making them wait in crowded areas with people they don't know. Instead, have a well-thought system that can process new people easily, putting them in control.

Ideas to Consider:

- Use an online check-in system with matching name tags.
- Use touchscreen technology so parents can enter their own information.
- Have cleaning stations and attendees to sanitize stations between uses.
- Have multiple check-in points to spread the load.
- Station greeters to connect with one parent while the other is filling out info.
- Have different lines for first-time guests and regular attendees.

4: Kids

Convenience
& Security



Have a Plan

Developing and sharing a safety protocol is essential, not only for the health of your own ministry but also for a point of reference that you can show parents. Parents don't just want to know that you have a plan, they want to know what that plan is. Create a plan, print it out, and share it however you see best.

Ideas to Consider:

- All volunteers working with kids should pass a background check.
- Adults taking kids to the bathroom should always go in pairs.
- Diapers should be changed outside of the restroom, with more than one adult present.
- Fire and evacuation procedures should be visible in each room.
- Security checkpoints should be monitored with exterior doors locked during the service.



5: Data

Capturing & Using Gathered Information

There's no sense in capturing information you can't use. And you won't use information you haven't considered. So it's worth taking a moment to determine what information you actually want, then leveraging it to gain valuable insights that could direct your future decisions.

5: Data

Capturing & Using Gathered Information



Information You Can Use

Think through what our church values and how knowing more about those things could help propel the vision of your church forward. For example, if your church values small groups, you might want to find out information from visitors around which you could make recommendations for groups. If a family has young kids, steer them into the group with childcare. If they are single, steer them to the singles, or men's, or women's group. And so on.

This idea doesn't just apply to new visitors but to your entire church. What do you need to know? And how will you capture it?

Ideas to Consider:

- Use a variety of online surveys to gather information in small bits.
- Ask questions and get answers around topics that matter to your ministry, not just data for data's sake.
- Discover "felt" data, like how people feel about certain topics, issues, or ideas.
- Craft guest experiences and spiritual formation opportunities based on what you discover.

5: Data

Capturing & Using Gathered Information



The Power of Reports

When thinking of reports, your mind might conjure images of reams of paper with useless numbers that only accountants are looking at. You'd be wrong to limit the power of reports to those notions. Reports have the power to inform, not only your team but your members. When people see actual data, it has the power to reinforce the truth and inspire participation. There are many ways reports can leap off the page and inspire change.

Ideas to Consider:

- On Easter Sunday, share a report of how many people gave their lives to Christ last year at your church and see how excited people become.
- Give donors a report on last year's giving and watch it increase.
- Show people how many items you donated to the food bank last year.
- Display your growth trajectory to help people see what's possible.
- Share the disparity between group signups and actual group attendance to help keep people accountable.

5: Data

Capturing & Using
Gathered Information



Using an Integrated System

The last thought on data: having a church management system that integrates your communication, discipleship, giving, check-in, and data systems in one place makes it exponentially easier to have all the data you need at your fingertips for every area of your ministry. The ability to see group participation, attendance stats, giving records, and family structures gives you a holistic picture of how God is moving in your ministry and how you can plan for greater things moving forward.

Ideas to Consider:

- Tracking a person's family, church, financial, and spiritual dynamics and growth in one place provides a ton of insights.
- Training teams on fewer solutions increases the usefulness of each solution.
- Thinking proactively about how you will be alongside people on their journey at your church will help you connect with them better, right from the start.



Now Pray For It and Run With It

Okay, so we didn't end this guide with the coolest of topics. But this is the Body of Christ, and each member has a part to play. So whether it's running reports or evangelizing in the streets, everything you do to prepare for Easter is important.

In all your planning, don't miss the power of the moment by being caught up in its preparation.

Remember what we're celebrating is a miraculous spiritual event that has brought hope to billions of people throughout history. When people gather online or in person to worship and celebrate the resurrection through your church, it's a big deal! So before you do any of the things in this guide, spend some time in prayer and keep your priorities straight. All of your plans are important, but not as important as letting God lead you to reach your community in a profound way this Easter. And remember, we're praying with you, trusting that God will lead your church to big things for his glory! So, take this advice and run with it!

Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

The know-how you need from experts you trust.

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). We are firmly dedicated to serving local churches all over North America by providing the best-in-class ministry software and service solutions that help you fulfill Christ's mission for your Church.

Tools and support to strengthen churches.

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the ministry challenges you face every day.

Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of pastors, church staff, congregants, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.


We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

We believe in YOU!


ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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