

Churchwide Planning Guide

“ *We never seem to plan far enough in advance. Something urgent always comes up and then things end up happening at the last minute.*”

Set strategic processes in place as they relate to your campus scheduling and churchwide calendar.

Remember, once something is on the calendar, it will likely need to be communicated. It can be costly (financially and/or relationally) to reverse scheduling decisions at the point when an event or initiative reaches the communications team. Make intentional choices at the beginning of the process.

So, what should be on the calendar? Ideally, everything on your calendar is helping you achieve your overall mission as a church. Keep in mind that you may say “no” to numerous good things so your “yes” can have greater impact.

CONSIDER THE LIFE CYCLE OF EVENTS AT YOUR CHURCH.

- How are events generated and placed on the calendar?
- Which ministries initiate the most events? Are there clear communications lines established with them through staff and/or volunteers?
- Who approves campus scheduling for events?
- Does each team member know your overarching strategy and goals? Does he/she have tools or processes to ensure you’re making intentional decisions about how to use your resources? Or do things operate on a first come, first serve basis?
- How do team members know what is happening in other ministry areas?
- Does your current timeline allow you to maximize opportunities for collaboration among the staff team and/or to involve volunteers at all levels?

Good planning processes will complement your communications strategy. Encourage all ministries to plan proactively. If you haven’t established a formal process, consider the plan on the following page.

1 SIX MONTHS PRIOR TO THE FOLLOWING QUARTER, CREATE THE MASTER CALENDAR. Example: In July, begin collecting information for the first quarter of the following year.

- **Meet for worship planning.** Map out dates for sermon series and any special worship components (guest speaker, special emphasis, anniversaries, etc.)
- **Plan for any major churchwide events or initiatives.** Example: Easter, outreach programs, celebrations or retreats.
- **Solicit plans for the next six months of ministry activities from staff and ministry leaders.** Ask them: What regular events will they continue? What new initiatives are in the works? What key messages do they want to communicate about these ministry activities? On your planning calendar, note any major off-site events like conferences or retreats so you can avoid creating competing opportunities.
- **Give everyone two deadlines:** a) a date for when you need to know the event's date and time; and b) a date for when you need to know all of the event's details (at least three weeks prior).
- **Give staff members access to view the churchwide calendar** on an ongoing basis to help with planning. In smaller churches with only a few staff members, a large wall calendar might suffice. Larger churches may utilize scheduling modules within a church management system or shared calendars within project management software.

2 ANALYZE/PLAN OUT A DRAFT OF THE COMMUNICATIONS CALENDAR.

Determine the Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 messages.

- **Develop promotional timelines** for each ministry component. (Allow two to three weeks of promotion per message.)
- **Watch for:**
 - **Opportunities for cross-promotion** (e.g., a sermon series on stewardship provides a perfect opportunity to emphasize a financial seminar).
 - **Potential conflicts** - times during the quarter when ministries may need to consider moving their activity (or working alongside another ministry) because the events compete.

3 ONCE THE CALENDAR IS FINALIZED, communications staff and volunteers begin working with ministries to communicate their messages.