

Fall
OUTREACH GUIDE

40

CHURCH-TESTED

IDEAS

INTRODUCTION

The transition into each new season provides fresh, unique opportunities to be the church and reach your community. Fall is no exception, as it ushers in a new school year; a return to more consistent work schedules with summer vacations in the past; the excitement of a new football season for high school, college and the pros; several special holidays and observances; and much more.

As fall brings about a return to many activities and routines of daily life, it's also a great time to encourage and invite people to return to church. New church plants and established congregations have found people to be receptive to invitations at this time of year.

To help you make the most of fall, we have compiled 40 proven outreach ideas from the pages of *Outreach* magazine. Churches across the country have put these ideas into practice, and we hope they edify and inspire you to capitalize on the outreach momentum the new season brings.

The Editors
Outreach magazine

How has your church effectively reached out during the fall? Let us know:

TellUs@OutreachMagazine.com.

Each issue of Outreach magazine features ideas, innovations, resources and stories to help you reach your community and change the world. Check out our current subscription offer at [OutreachMagazine.com/offer](https://www.outreachmagazine.com/offer).

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BACK TO SCHOOL

1. Meet With the Principal

Meet one-on-one with a local school principal and ask how your church can help meet school needs. Bridge Building, a ministry of Forefront Church in Lakewood, Colo., meets quarterly with the principal of Bear Creek Elementary School to discuss the school's needs and how the church can support the school. At year's end, they meet to reassess progress. Church teams have led various projects from gardening and recycling to meal preparation.

"It is basically a foot-washing for the school," says Bridge Building Director Michael Mele. "We've made inroads and built relationships there that would have otherwise seemed unlikely."

2. Help Underprivileged Students Prepare for School

Many underresourced families in your area struggle to get their children ready to return to school each fall because of the costs of clothes, school supplies and other expenses. Your church can help them overcome that challenge.

Hold a special event where underprivileged students are given a backpack with donated school supplies, some new clothes and free haircuts from volunteer stylists before the school year begins.

Or ask attendees to help reduce the cost of school supplies in an underresourced area. Community 4:12, a ministry initiative of Community Christian Church in the Chicago area, provides "school supplies with dignity" to students at a local elementary school, Community 4:12 Director Kirsten Strand says. Church attendees sponsor a teacher-selected student kit for \$25 that students can then purchase for \$5 to \$7. All money raised is donated to the school.

"This is not about a rich, wealthy community coming in to save a low-income area," Strand stresses. "We all have something to share, contribute and learn; and we strive to work alongside our schools to help them achieve their own goals."

3. Provide Clothes for Low-Income Kids

Many youth and children in your community may lack the resources to buy new clothes before and during the school year. Ask church attendees to donate new or gently used clothing of various sizes, and set up a boutique-style location at the church, where students can privately choose new outfits for free. Work with school officials and local social service agencies to let people know of the service you're providing.

and have students “shop” by appointment to protect their privacy.

Krystal Koons, 50, and her 17-year-old daughter, Kaileigh, started the Teens’ Closet through American Lutheran Church in Prescott, Ariz. They collected donations from family, friends and clothing stores, then launched the boutique inside a small room in a building the church maintains for youth ministries.

“By Aug. 1 [2011] it was open; by October [2011] we had outgrown it,” Koons says, adding the ministry overtook another room in the building in the fall. “The outpouring from the community was absolutely amazing.”

In March 2012, the ministry moved into a small home donated by a church member. Today, it serves about 30 teenagers a month.

“Teens’ Closet is an example of what happens when somebody listens to the call of the Lord and says, ‘Yes,’” Pastor Dan Storvick says. “It touches lives in ways we will not know until we go home to the Father.”

4. Mentor Students

The start of a new school year is a great time to launch a new ministry to mentor and tutor students in your community.

The District Church in Washington, D.C., provides mentoring, spiritual growth, after-school activities and help with class work to students from nearby Cardozo High School, which has one of the highest dropout rates in the city.

Volunteers spend time helping in the school’s classrooms, leading a recreational basketball team for the area youth, and coaching the high school football team. The District Church has also partnered with a few nearby churches to form a Youth Club that meets weekly for singing, games and a short message about Christ.

“Being a consistent presence in these kids’ lives, building a relationship with them—even though it will be hard and it will be discouraging—leads kids to trust us,” says Blythe Scott, the church’s initiative coordinator. “Through these relationships, kids come to our other events.”

Parachurch organizations like Kids Hope USA also can help your church start a mentoring ministry.

ONLINE: KidsHopeUSA.com

5. Become an After-School Hangout

Is your church close to a local school? Create a space on your campus to serve as a safe, after-school hangout for kids who otherwise would be home alone. Provide free snacks like soda and popcorn, games to play, and homework help for students who want it. Faith Lutheran Church in Rapid City, S.D., opens its doors the last Friday of each month to students from the middle school located across the street. Hundreds of kids have partici-

pated in the church's "Thank God It's Friday" events. "We don't have an agenda, other than to let the kids know we're a place that cares," Pastor Jeff Rohr says.

6. Meet Community Service Requirements

Help students get community service experience and credits for clubs and college applications by inviting them to participate in your church's service projects.

7. Feed the Football Team

In addition to cheering on its local high school football team, the Scott City High School Rams, Eisleben Lutheran Church in Scott City, Mo., has fed the hungry players after the game, serving hot dogs at a bonfire in the church's outdoor pavilion. "It's one way we can be a blessing to the team and get to know them," Pastor Marty Hasz says.

8. Support Student-Athletes

Help sports teams at local schools have the uniforms and equipment they need as their seasons begin in the fall. The Word Center in Jackson, Miss., heard that the local high school football team, the Callaway Chargers, were about to begin a season wearing three-year-old uniforms. The church of 70 attendees at the time raised money and presented the team a check to buy 85 new jerseys in a show of support and encouragement. The Word Center also provides students grapes and bottled water during their standardized testing week and gives away laptops and gift cards to the test's top scorers as an incentive to stay in school and study hard. "It's carved a solid relationship between The Word Center and the entire Jackson Public School District," Pastor Roderick Richardson says.

9. Create a Fun, Post-Football Game Venue

Give high school students a fun, safe place to hang out after Friday and Saturday football games. Provide pizza, snacks, drinks, music, video games and a relaxed atmosphere to build relationships.

10. Offer Computer Access

Create a computer lab at the church that is open to students after school and on weekends to help them with their homework.

11. Support a Classroom

Offer financial and moral support by adopting a classroom at a local school.

ONLINE: AdoptAClass.net

BACK TO CHURCH

12. Participate in National Back to Church Sunday (Sept. 16, 2012)

Every September, thousands of churches nationwide join the Back to Church Sunday movement to reach the unchurched and dechurched in their communities. Participating churches have consistently experienced attendance growth that continues long after the event.

Jessica Hawkins is one of the hundreds of thousands of people across the country who attended a Back to Church Sunday church in 2011.

A 30-year-old mother of three, Hawkins had drifted away from churchgoing and quit attending the church she had grown up in. She felt a spiritual emptiness and a “lack of open arms” at that church.

Then one fall day in 2011, she received an invitation to attend National Back to Church Sunday at Life in Christ Fellowship in West Jefferson, Ohio. Hawkins says she was “just overcome by the Holy Spirit” at Life in Christ Fellowship and felt a divine tug to rededicate her life to Jesus. She did, and now she and her children are regular attendees.

“My children were very excited,” Hawkins says. “It’s a lovely, upbeat, very friendly and open atmosphere. I just remember kind of feeling the need and pull to get back to church.”

More than 7,600 churches from 34 denominations drew 250,000 visitors for Back to Church Sunday in 2011.

Scott Polley, pastor at the 80-member church, says attendance at Life in Christ nearly doubled at the event last year, and a number of people, including Hawkins, rededicated their lives to Jesus and are now regulars.

“It’s a phenomenal, door-opening opportunity for us,” Polley says. “It’s a nonthreatening way to invite people to church. It’s like a big family reunion.”

ONLINE: BacktoChurch.com

13. **Declare “Back to Church Month”**

Extend the spirit and impact of an event like Back to Church Sunday by declaring September “Back to Church Month” at your church.

First Baptist Church of Creedmoor, N.C., made September 2009 a time to follow up with one-time visitors or people who had fallen off the radar. The church also encouraged churchgoers to invite their friends with “Fill the Seat Next to You Day,” and Sunday school classes competed against one another to bring in the most visitors.

“It gives us a definitive point at which to follow up with visitors,” Youth Pastor David Richardson says of the fall initiative. “At that time, our normal attendance was around 125. During Back to Church Month, we saw our Sunday school attendance increase from 110 to 140, and our youth group added 15 to 20 kids.”

14. **Hold a Community Life Sunday**

Set aside a Sunday specifically to build momentum for ministry and help attendees identify opportunities to become involved.

The Shoreline Church in San Clemente, Calif., kicks off fall with Community Life Sunday, where attendees watch a video briefly highlighting ministry opportunities. From the pulpit, pastors encourage people to sign up that morning after the service.

The church’s Connect ministry plays a key role in follow-up efforts, helping to introduce first- or second-time guests to The Shoreline and integrate more regular attendees into the life of the church. Connect features a dinner hosted at the pastor’s home with church staff, followed by an introductory study and individual gift assessments—an effective segue to go from “just looking” to “completely involved” in just a few steps, Community Life Pastor Seth Ebel says.

15. **Engage in Church Planting**

Fall is a great time for new church plants to launch their worship services and have the maximum impact in reaching the community. Consider working within your denomination or with a church planting organization—Exponential, Association of Related Churches, NewThing, Stadia, Launch, etc.—to plant a new church or provide financial, prayer and other support to a church plant.

ONLINE: Exponential.org; ARCChurches.com;
NewThing.org; Stadia.cc; LaunchStrong.com

16. Develop a Small Group Culture

North Coast Church in Vista, Calif., is known nationwide for its effectiveness at connecting people to small groups. For several consecutive weeks each fall, North Coast shows videos illustrating the importance of being in a Growth Group; creates and passes out booklets with information on available groups (leaders, hosts, location and study subject); trains group leaders and hosts; and makes it easy to sign up for a group—either in person, online or by phone. Groups meet three quarters of the year, then take the summer off. So when fall registration rolls around, people are ready to connect.

For small group curriculum and ideas, [click here](#).

17. Recruit Small Group Leaders and Participants

The Summit Church of Durham, N.C., hosts a large push in August to recruit small group leaders, trains them and promotes GroupLink, an initiative designed to launch new groups and add people to existing ones. GroupLink day features a sermon on community; a casual, small-group meet and greet after the worship service; and the opportunity to peruse small group study materials.

18. Focus Small Groups on Community Service

Start a new initiative through which each small group in your church commits to a long-term service project to help the community.

Momentum Christian Church in Garfield Heights, Ohio, made community service a high priority for its “Mo Groups,” which have names like Captured, Ruckus and Shockwave and are scattered throughout the Cleveland area. Lead Minister Dan Smith has described the groups as ministry teams that meet weekly to eat, study Scripture, fellowship and engage in long-term service projects.

“It’s like a band of brothers you can serve with,” Smith says.

A group that met at Smith’s home worked with an assisted-living home that served mentally challenged individuals, regularly raked leaves for the elderly and cleaned up neighborhoods.

Todd Hronec, part of Smith’s group, grew up going to church, but was turned off by religion until he started going to Momentum in 2009. Other churches he went to, he says, were more about making money than helping people.

“When you really start going through the Bible, you learn that God wasn’t much of a just-sit-here-and-listen type of person,” Hronec says. “He was constantly sending people out to help those in the community. I believe that’s part of God’s work, and I think that’s the most important part.”

HOLIDAYS & OBSERVANCES

FOOTBALL SEASON STARTS

19. Organize Tailgate Parties

Join the fun at local college or professional football games and hold your own tailgate party. Bring benches and umbrellas, play worship music and give away items like small footballs. Work with local restaurants to provide free food or enlist volunteers to barbecue.

20. Serve Local Peewee League Families

If you're near a field where youth sports teams play, open up your building and allow teams, parents and other fans to use the restrooms. In colder weather, serve free hot chocolate and coffee. Offer to let teams have their end-of-the-season parties at the church for free.

A simple act of kindness made this a seasonal ritual at Essexville Baptist Community Church in Essexville, Mich. Church custodian Pat Smith was working at the church on a Saturday morning, when more than a hundred parents and kids had gathered at the elementary school's football field across the street for the weekly peewee league football games. The school building was locked, and no restrooms were available. In a crowd that size, with that many little football players all suited up, someone would need a restroom sooner or later.

A parent asked Smith if they could use the church's restrooms. The church then began to open its doors every fall Saturday when the league plays at the school's field. The church also started organizing each Saturday's football hospitality event and intentionally welcoming its neighbors.

Several teams have since hosted their end-of-season parties in the church fellowship hall, and the connection between the church and the football teams has opened doors for other ministry opportunities, such as counseling and weddings. The church also invites football families to other events like vacation Bible school.

Many parents have written notes of appreciation to the church, including one that said, "You're a church that is doing something and cares about the community."

Pastor Richard Kinnamon says he was touched by the community's response.

"It's an easy thing to do," he says, "but it has an impact you don't realize."

LABOR DAY (SEPT. 3, 2012)

21. Work to Serve Your Community

Each Labor Day weekend, A New Walk Christian Fellowship in Gainesville, Ga., hosts a “Labor of Love,” giving away thousands of dollars’ worth of donated clothing and food collected from businesses and individuals throughout the community, in addition to providing hair cuts for adults and kids as they get ready to go back to school. In 2011, the church served some 500 people in its low-income neighborhood. “People are tired of hearing the words ‘I love you,’” Pastor Dewayne Payne says. “They want to see it! So, that’s what we’re doing. We’re showing them we love them.”

22. Care for First-Responders

Show emergency responders who have to work on Labor Day that you care by visiting hospitals, police and fire stations, etc., with gifts, baked goods and thank you cards.

PATRIOT DAY (SEPT. 11, 2012)

23. Commemorate the Anniversary of 9/11

Honor local firefighters and police officers. Deliver gifts such as homemade cookies, gift cards, etc., to them. Recruit your children’s ministry to sing a patriotic song and pray aloud for each group.

HALLOWEEN

24. Host a Community Pumpkin Patch

If space permits, create a pumpkin patch on church grounds. Allow families to visit, take pictures and pick up a free pumpkin. Designate an area for families to get an autumn picture taken by a volunteer photographer with props such as hay bales, scarecrows and gourds. Direct them to your church’s website to view the photos or gather mailing address information to send them hard copies of the photos along with an invite to your services.

25. Hold a Pumpkin Chunkin’ Fundraiser

Have some fun and support a good cause with a Pumpkin Chunkin’ event. Columbiana United Methodist Church in Columbiana, Ala., engaged the crowds that came out for their city’s annual Halloween “Monster Walk.” More than 50 community members—from children to senior citizens—bought a pumpkin for \$3.50 (or three for \$10)

to throw as far as possible. Although the winning throw was 45 feet, the real winners were members of the church's youth group, who used the money raised for a fall retreat at a nearby camp.

26. Reverse Trick-or-Treat

Encourage church attendees to “reverse trick-or-treat,” going door to door and handing out fair-trade chocolates and fliers raising awareness about human trafficking and slavery worldwide.

27. Perform an Outdoor Drama

Stage dramatic performances and dance routines set to music outside during trick-or-treat hours, and hand out tracts and candy to passersby.

NATIONAL FAMILY LITERACY DAY (NOV. 1, 2012)

28. Support Reading Efforts

Ask a few friends to come with you to volunteer to become reading tutors. Or hold a community read-a-thon at the church, highlighting popular children's stories and Bible stories.

ORPHAN SUNDAY (NOV. 4, 2012)

29. Educate Attendees About Adoption, Etc.

Christian Alliance for Orphans equips churches and organizations across the nation with resources—from posters and videos to sermon ideas and study questions—to host a Sunday dedicated to orphans and learning how Christians can help through adoption, foster care and other initiatives.

ONLINE: OrphanSunday.org

30. Join the Orphan's Table

As part of recognizing Orphan Sunday, consider participating in The Orphan's Table as a church, a Sunday school class or small group. Invite family and friends to sit down and share an easy-to-cook meal—shipped to you by Christian Alliance for Orphans—that is similar to meals prepared for and eaten by orphans around the world. Follow it up with discussion and prayer for how you as an individual or as a group can help the parentless.

ONLINE: OrphanSunday.org/orphans-table

NATIONAL GRANDPARENTS DAY (SEPT. 9, 2012)

31. Start a Support Group for Grandparents as Parents

Many grandparents end up as the primary caregiver and guardian for their grandchildren. Honor them by starting a support group to help them. Or schedule a special event to give them information and resources about the modern realities of bullying, social media and other pressures facing their grandkids.

First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Gary, Ind., held a “Grandparents Raising Grandkids” conference.

Mary Vaughn, the program director for the church’s community and faith outreach ministry, identifies with the need. She helped raise five of her own grandkids.

The church worked with local schools to identify families and placed ads in newspapers to draw people to the conference, Vaughn says.

“This event shows grandparents that they’re not alone, and we have people and places to help them raise their grandkids,” Vaughn says. “Many of the grandkids who attended are under 12 years old, so their grandparents will need help for a few more years.”

Local organizations and agencies provided information and seminars covering additional topics such as AIDS and HIV, Internet monitoring and legal guardianship.

Pamela Wilson, a grandparent raising two grandsons, ages 9 and 11, shared her struggles and ideas with other grandparents while their grandkids attended activity times structured just for them.

“It’s a stressful time, raising grandkids in the age of the Internet,” Wilson says. “This conference was educational and very worthwhile.”

VETERANS DAY (NOV. 11, 2012)

32. Comfort the Wounded

Encourage the quilt makers in your church to use their hobby to honor and comfort wounded veterans by sewing quilts for them. The Quilts of Valor Foundation can help. Present quilts as gifts on Veterans Day.

ONLINE: QOVF.org

33. Provide Adaptive Clothing

Injured veterans often need adaptive clothing to accommodate burns, casts and other injuries. Work with a group like Sew Much Comfort and draft people in your church who love to sew to provide such clothing for free.

ONLINE: SewMuchComfort.org

34. Launch a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Support Group

Make your church a place to which combat veterans can turn for help by launching a support group for those struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder or other issues. Ask military veterans in your church to lead the group.

John Blehm, a Vietnam veteran who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, started the support group Bridge to Healing in 2008 at Skyway Church in Goodyear, Ariz.

In 1969, the U.S. Army deployed Blehm to the jungles of Vietnam. The decorated soldier returned 19 months later, but a new enemy lurked within.

“When I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder in 1997, I was on my third divorce,” Blehm, 63, says. “I couldn’t keep a job, and I was an alcoholic. My body came back [from Vietnam], but I didn’t.”

Though he still bears the scars of the disorder, Blehm has a new life in Christ and ministers to other veterans through Bridge to Healing.

Located near an Air Force base, the church saw the disorder’s effects and asked Blehm to help reach veterans, providing them prayer and support. Each week for two hours, about 10 men gather on the church’s campus to study the Campus Crusade for Christ Military Ministry’s *Combat Trauma Healing Manual*, share and seek spiritual guidance. The stories are much the same: nightmares, anger, broken relationships, drinking, felony charges. Attendees never “graduate,” but they learn spiritual and medical techniques to handle symptoms—and hear about the hope Blehm found in Christ.

“They’ll try everything else first,” Blehm says. “Then they’ll say, ‘OK, God.’”

Blehm’s wife, Karen, leads a second support group for military wives devastated by their husbands’ condition. Approximately 100 churches nationwide offer similar men’s and women’s groups, but Blehm says many more are needed, especially as military return from Afghanistan and other posts. The key is finding veterans or their wives to lead.

“Veterans speak a different language,” he explains. “We understand what each one is saying and what to say to them.”

That understanding drew Jim, 62, a retired Marine, to Blehm when he started attending Bridge to Healing in 2009. “With John being a combat veteran, I could relate better to him than a psychologist who read it from a book,” Jim says. “I can go to him with anything. He’s my best friend.”

ONLINE: MilitaryMinistry.org

NATIONAL SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE DAY (NOV. 17, 2012)

35. Raise Money for At-Risk Youth

Organize a walk/run to raise money to provide free professional counseling for at-risk, underinsured youth.

36. Boost Awareness

Host a movie night to raise awareness about warning signs and suicide prevention efforts. Show the film *To Save a Life*. Provide suicide prevention resources to those who attend.

ONLINE: OutreachFilms.com

37. Remember Lost Loved Ones

Create a special memorial, such as a photo quilt, and hold a candlelight vigil to remember loved ones who committed suicide and comfort their families. Invite someone directly affected by suicide to speak at your Sunday services and distribute prevention resources.

THANKSGIVING (NOV. 22, 2012)

38. Help Holiday Travelers

Enlist volunteers to provide a free shuttle service to help holiday travelers get to and from the airport and avoid high airport parking fees. Designate one person to track reservations and pickups.

39. Host International Students

Work with area colleges to host international students at either a large Thanksgiving church celebration or through families who sign up to host students in their homes.

40. Incorporate Other Cultures

Invite your community to a multicultural Thanksgiving event, where attendees of various ethnicities share a specialty from their own countries.

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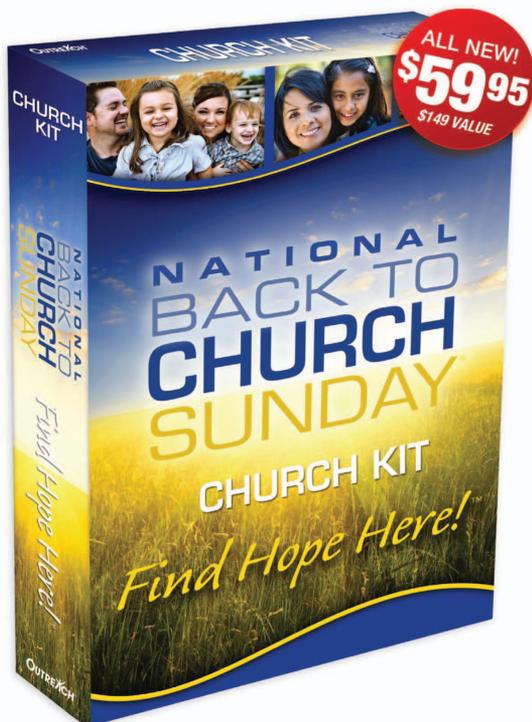
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