

How To host an Open Day

HOPE25
HOPE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD



This guide will help you to plan your Hope25 event.

Purpose

An Open Day can be a great way to demystify the church building and help people feel comfortable and welcomed. Many people in Australian society may not have been inside a church building for a long time, perhaps ever! This can mean that they feel unsure if they are welcome or if they need to do something to enter.

An Open Day can help remove barriers to entering the church and build relationships with people so that they see that they are welcome.

Planning

Team

It is always a good idea to work in a team. We each bring different gifts and skills, and using these together can help us engage a wider range of people in our events so that we are not aiming to engage only those who are exactly like us.

You will need to ensure that your team has people who are good with administration, communications, and finances. It would also be great to include people of a variety of ages. Depending on what you plan to do at the Open Day, you might want to include your music/choir director on your team. Ensure that the people you have on the team will also be holding the event in prayer and encouraging others to do so.

Before the Event

When you have your team in place, you will need to look at the parish and local calendars and find a date for your event. If you are close to the centre of town and there is a town festival or event happening nearby, you might choose to piggyback on that event and have yours at the same time. Before you lock your date in, ensure that key people who you would like to be part of the Open Day are available.

You will need to look at the list below and brainstorm as a team some elements that will become part of your open day. Consider what is needed to do these well, how much it might cost, and who from your team or broader church community might be responsible for that part of the day.

Ensure that all of your volunteers are meeting your relevant safe ministry requirements. If you are doing activities for children, it may be good to have them in the same area as their parents wandering around the church or to have space for the parents in the activities. Given the church's history, many parents may not feel comfortable having their children out of sight of them in that environment.

What you do during an Open Day will depend on your location, tradition, building, and community. Try to present to those who attend the community that you are. Be authentic; don't try to be something that you are not. Australians value authenticity. Share your love of Jesus, the reason behind your worship, but don't feel that you need to be something you are not.

You may choose to have short performances throughout the day. An advantage of this is that it gets a group together. If your choir sings, they might invite friends or family along, the same with a worship band or other performers. Often, people are more likely to go to an event, not necessarily because they love the idea of the event but because they want to support a loved one.

- Choir singing: You may choose to have a mini concert or "songs on the hour" during the day.
- Music playing in the background (or as part of a small concert) on the organ, piano, or from a band.
- Poetry reading: There is a lot of religious poetry. You may choose to have someone read poetry that they have written or found supports their love of God.
- Dramatic presentations of faith journeys or bible stories.

People will want to come and see and understand your church. Many will not know how a church works or understand words like "nave" and "vestry." Show them around and share with them the history and work of the church.

- Tours of the church that explain what happens in each part of the church.
- Explanations of the Bible, communion elements, font, etc. These can be included in tours but written and put near each item so people can look around in their own time.
- Put up a photo display (printed photos work best as people can look at those that interest them more quickly, but you may choose to have some on a screen, too). Ensure that you have permission to display the photos - especially if they have children or images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

While some people will want to sneak a look inside or have a quick wander through the church, it's great to have some activities that might create space for conversation or relationship building. These might include:

- Bible storytelling works particularly well if you have stories depicted in art or stained glass windows.
- Telling stories of saints associated with your church.
- Video presentation—You may have a place within the church with a video playing testimonies from different people in your parish about why Jesus is important to them. Get as many people as possible and play it on a loop. If possible, have subtitles for those who are hearing impaired.
- Kids talk, kids games, craft activities.
- Adults craft activities (discussion on icon writing or flower arranging)
- Open the parish registers and help people to find their own church and family history

An Open Day is also a time to create space for conversations and prayer with people coming into your church. Some will want to have space to pray alone or with others (if you have a small chapel space, you might use this as a space for quietness). Some elements that you might include to help those who are hurting or need guidance, a listening ear, or prayer might be:

- Acknowledgement of past hurts through signage in the church.
- Space for conversation for those who want to talk to someone pastorally.
- Space where people can go to have someone pray with them,
- A book/iPad where people can write or type their prayer requests, and the congregation can pray for them.

People like food. It is a way that we often build community and share. Having some food available would be a great thing. You might set up a cafe inside or outside the church where people can sit for a little while. Here are some ideas of what you might provide. You could choose to have people who are part of your church community bring food or ask local businesses to join you.

- Tea, coffee and soft drinks
- Cakes
- Sausage sizzle
- Meat pies, sausage rolls
- Sandwiches
- Soups and bread
- Hot crossed buns

It is good to give people something to take away with them. You might do this by providing each guest with a show bag containing several items. You may also choose to have items present for people to take as they leave and someone with those items to point them in the right direction.

- Easter eggs
- Small crosses
- An item from a bible story or Saint central to your parish.
- A New Testament or a gospel.
- Information about church events such as Sunday services, youth ministry, kid's ministry, playgroup, book clubs, bible studies, film nights, etc.
- Information on a short course you are running, such as Emmaus, Pilgrim, Alpha, etc.
- Information about baptism, confirmation, weddings and funerals

Communication

Three key areas of communication will be essential to hosting this event.

1. **Within your team:** You must ensure that your planning team is on the same page and can share any necessary documents.
2. **Within your parish:** Ensure that your parish knows what is planned and is joining in prayer for the event. Also, invite friends, family, and neighbours to come to the service. You can communicate internally through parish email updates, notices during services, information in pew sheets, and any other form of contact your parish uses.
3. **With your community and invitees:** it is often easier to invite others to an event if they have something to give them. Consider a postcard-sized information sheet and some information on your parish webpage. Ensure that anything you hand out has the date and time of the service as well as the church website. Depending on your context, consider including information on car parking, kid's ministry, and the general shape of the event. You might consider:
 - a. A letterbox drop in your local community
 - b. Giving cards to each member of your parish community and encouraging them to think of two people that they can pray for and invite to the service.

Problem-Solving

What if...

When hosting an event, we must always be ready for the unexpected. It may be a choir member being unwell, a performer who gets COVID, the death of a key person within the parish or severe weather that means people are hesitant to leave their houses on the day. An event going differently than planned does not mean it will be a disaster. God works through imperfection and outright disaster all the time.

Where you can, ensure that you have backups available. Ask people to write down what they are doing so that it can be passed on if something happens. Ensure your technology is working, and you have a backup of any files you need for the service.

Sometimes, people get sick, or plans change. For an Open Day, you want to be open and available. You may find that many people come through the doors, or it might be very few. That is all right. Work with what you have on the day. Have plans, but remember that it is ok to be flexible.

Paths Forward

What now?

When we try new things, we change. Three key groups to consider as you chart a path forward:

Your existing congregation

Some have stepped out in faith and invited people to your Open Day. Some will have been on a church planning team for the first time, gained new skills, and deepened relationships. Some will have taken leadership in different areas of the day or engaged with people in spiritual conversations. Now that people have taken these steps, how can we continue supporting them as Jesus' disciples as they grow in their faith?

Newcomers

The people who visited your church for the Open Day will need a path forward, too. Some may have been previously part of your church but have moved to another church or stopped coming. Ensure you reconnect with these people. For those who have stopped coming to church, invite them along, catch up with them, and see if they would like to reconnect with the community. Those who have come to explore your church for the first time and have expressed interest in the parish need to be connected to a place where they can learn about Jesus and meet others in the community. Some options might be:

- Just for Starters
- Alpha
- Life Course
- Simply Christianity
- Christian Essentials

You will also need to put together a team to help lead each of these, so it may be a good path forward for those in your parish to continue to try new things.

Implementation Plan

Firstly

Choose when to have your Open Day.

Given the capacity, size, and demography of your church and local community, decide on the shape of the day and what kinds of activities you could host.

Secondly

Communicate internally and externally.

Ensure that you have given church members tools to invite others to the event and that your local community knows it is happening.

Ensure that everything that needs to be done for the event has a name next to it.

Thirdly

Have the Open Day.

Deal with any issues that come up with care and compassion, knowing that God works in our weakness.

Greet people with welcoming, caring, and loving attitudes. Invite them to engage in the ministry of the Church.

Finally

Think about what happens next.

Ensure you follow up with visitors who came to the Open Day and expressed interest in knowing more about the Church and its ministry.

How will you support people in their discipleship of Jesus after the Open Day?