



A 'community at work' celebration

F5

Purpose

To celebrate the working life of the area of which the church is an integral part.

Content

The celebration consists of two equally important parts:

- a display, open to the public, of products, artefacts and/or printed literature representing the working life of the area, set up in the church sanctuary and/or other appropriate places on church premises;
- a service of celebration and dedication.

The celebration can be held at any time, or linked to an annual occasion of celebration such as harvest festival.

The display should last at least two or three days (including the Sunday), including, if possible, when people are coming onto church premises for a range of reasons and can visit the display at the same time.

Preparation

The display

- Planning needs to start at least four months before the event.
- Set up a steering group to plan the event with, if possible, contacts in the local working community and with the necessary expertise.
- The celebration should be focused on one church, but should be undertaken either as an ecumenical endeavour or with the support of other churches in the area.
- If possible work with the local Chamber of Commerce, Rotary and Probus clubs, etc but ensure that the church retains overall control.
- Check that the church is insured and, when not attended, secure for a display of this kind as some items offered for display might be valuable.
- Obtain a list of the names and addresses of all businesses, shops, hospitality agencies, health centres, schools and other services in the area. If the number is too large to handle, a decision may have to be made as to which agencies to omit (for example, charity shops or residential homes).
- It is important to be upfront about whether or not to invite places that sell alcohol or are involved in gambling to contribute to the display. (Methodist Conference regulations do not appear to rule this out, and it could be a means of building bridges with an important body within the area.)

Invitations, visiting and advertising

- Prepare a letter from the minister and/or deacon, on church-headed notepaper; inviting businesses and shops etc. to offer an item, product, artefact or literature for display and indicate when these should be sent or brought to the church. In the same letter invite them to the service of celebration. State in the letter that the items or products offered should not be too large. Indicate a day immediately after the event when they can collect their items from the church. State that items not collected afterwards will be used for charitable purposes. Include a reply slip asking those contacted whether or not they will be (a) contributing to the display and/or (b) coming to the service of celebration.

- Prepare cards and posters advertising the event and distribute widely (including to other churches). Advertise the event in the local press and on radio and on the church web site.
- Three weeks before the celebration, organise a group to deliver the invitations. Retired people can play a major part here. No person should be expected to deliver more than 15 invitations.
- Early in the morning is often the best time to visit, but this will depend on local circumstances. Brief the group fully and have a prayer before people leave.
- Visitors should seek to give the invitation to the manager or proprietor of the agency concerned.

Near to the event

- A week beforehand put up notices around the area advertising the event.
- Three or four days before the items are due, arrange for limited follow-up visits to remind those who have responded positively that their contribution needs to be sent very soon – this reminder is very important. If necessary some reminder letters could go out before that by post.

Organising and supervising the display

- Arrange for people to be at the church to receive and set up the items for display. (This is a demanding task and will require those with display skills.)
- Produce a leaflet to be handed out to visitors saying what the display is about alongside something about the church and what it stands for.
- Have a visitor's book in which people can offer comments.
- Arrange for people to welcome visitors and supervise the display.

The service of celebration

The service of celebration should involve people from the local working agencies. Use photos of the area in the intercessions. Invite everyone to coffee afterwards.

Points to note

- A key factor in the success of such an initiative is to appoint a person with the ability to coordinate and give impetus to the celebration.
- It is essential that the Church Council catches the vision behind the celebration and gives its full backing. Keep church members well informed.
- Take photos of the display as a future reminder of the event.
- After the event, send letters of thanks to those who have provided things for the display.
- The event will require some financial support. However, *do not* allow the celebration to be turned into a fundraising campaign!

Resources

An event of this kind was organised by Bakewell Methodist Church in the Peak Circuit (Sheffield District) in 2007. Further details from David Clark, Hill View, Burton Close Drive, Bakewell DE45 1BG. Tel: 01629 81017.

David Clark

[David Clark is a member of the Methodist Diaconal Order.]