

I believe that a common mistake that churches often make is downplaying summer or even blowing it off as a season that requires little work because “people won’t be there anyway” or “everyone will be on vacation, and church will be a low priority.” There may be some truth to this, but we don’t want to cooperate with a season when people might get out of the habit of connecting with their church family. Even worse, feel like they have permission from their senior pastor and church leadership not to attend, to quit giving and get out of the habit of an important connection.

We might hope they will come back in the fall, and for most churches, there will be a few who will not be back. What can we do?

- Encourage people to worship online when they are on vacation. Make this opportunity available on your website or social media.
- Ask them to check-in when they are worshipping online or with a church while they’re away; they can tell their story and post on social media, etc. Also, you can leave the church you’re visiting with something. We gave out blue *God Is Big Enough* wristbands. They can take pictures and post on social media or send pictures to the pastor or pastors.
- Put together a summer Bible study that can be worked on wherever they are – online, video or with a hand-out focus of some kind.

Another tool that I found very effective . . . instead of saving our best message series or emphasis for the fall, January or another season, why not offer it in the summer? Does there have to be a summer attendance falloff? Not necessarily. In fact, research tells us that many first-time visitors first drop by in the summer as people with families often move during that time due to school schedules.

Think about a summer-long message series, maybe 10 weeks. If the regular

communicator, often the senior pastor, takes some time off in the summer, then make sure the guest preacher connects with the message series. One series that I did that was very successful, *10 Reasons Why People Are Leaving the Church and 10 Reasons Why They Are Coming Back*. Yes, it was 10 weeks long, and there is a book by the same name. We did a summer family series that was 10 weeks long, as well as a number of series on the Bible. This made it is easy to connect a Bible study with it. Elevate, publicize, promote and work as hard on it as you would any series or sermon.

Plan summer family events, camps, picnics, gatherings after church that provide the summer feel with hotdogs, outdoor games for kids or cookouts. Connect Vacation Bible Camp (VBS) with Sunday worship, Glen Lake Camp weeks and other summer activities. Have a big back-to-school prayer month, celebrate educators and pray for people in worship as they head off for a family vacation.

Make the summer as big a deal as Christmas and Easter. Teach them to look forward to what special series, programs and focuses will be launched heading into summer, just like we do for the more traditional, big seasons. Then we won't have a back-to-school push for worship because they will never have left.