
Friendship Ablaze!

Section 1

Introduction and Planning

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Welcome to *Friendship Ablaze!*

This resource will help your congregation to celebrate *friendship in Jesus Christ*, both among the saints of the congregation, as well as new and familiar people in the community. Jesus declared: “*Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.* (John 15:13). He expressed that loving friendship perfectly and profoundly on the cross, giving His life as a ransom for all. And now, the friendships which God’s people create and nurture are dynamic opportunities for Christian witness, authentic relationship involvement which provides the opportunity for the Word of Christ to be shared and received.

A group of gifted friends of Jesus (see page 1-3) gathered to plan and prepare this resource to support and strengthen outreach to friends in your personal life and congregation.

Christian demographers claim that there are more than 150,000,000 unchurched people living in the United States, making this nation the third largest English-speaking mission field in the world. Jesus Christ yearns for them to be His friends in faith and connected to His body, the church. There is a growing need for God’s people to “*always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*” (I Peter 3:15)

Through the ***Ablaze!*** initiative, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has called the people of our congregations to share the Good News of Jesus with 50,000,000 unchurched/uncommitted people here in the United States by 2017, and to plant 2,000 new congregations by the same year.

Individual Christians can do that. Congregations can do that. And your congregation can help your people to *always be prepared to give that life-changing answer about faith in Jesus Christ*. This resource was prepared with the prayer that we will be encouraged and supported in sharing the Good News about Jesus, especially with our friends. This is the reason for gathering these resources under the theme ***Friendship Ablaze!***

Welcome to the fire, the *cozy fire* of ***Friendship Ablaze!***

From
The Center for U.S. Missions and
District and Congregational Services—Outreach Ministry,
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

About *Friendship Ablaze!*

These materials were prepared

- thanks to a generous grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans;
- at the request of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod District and Congregational Services—Outreach Ministry; and
- under the direction of The Center for U.S. Missions, Rev. Michael R. Ruhl, Executive Director.

They were written to encourage and enable congregations to equip their members to reach out with the love of Jesus Christ and embrace their unchurched friends. Material for a Friendship Sunday outreach is included as part of an overall, ongoing Friendship outreach focus.

The materials are available for free download from www.friendshipablaze.org. Printed copies are available at a cost of \$40.00 plus shipping from the Center for U.S. Missions, 1530 Concordia West, Irvine, California 92612; 949-854-8002 x1780; office@centerforusmissions.org.

The title *Friendship Ablaze!* was chosen because these materials support the *Ablaze!* initiative, a worldwide mission movement of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to share the Good News of Jesus with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people, 50 million of them in the United States, by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. (website <http://www.lcms.org/pages/default.asp?NavID=5247>)

Ablaze! and *Friendship Ablaze!* center on one Christian giving witness of the hope that is within him or her to another person so that person may encounter Christ (called the “critical event”).

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Materials in This Collection

The various items in this ***Friendship Ablaze!*** collection have been designed to help a congregation carry out “friendship evangelism” – members inviting their friends to meet their Best Friend, Jesus Christ.

A variety of material is included so each church can select what will work best in their situation. The list below describes each item. As you select, however, note the following two steps, often overlooked, which are actually essential for any church planning outreach events.

1. Prepare to welcome your guests.

You don’t invite people to your home without considering whether or not your home is ready to receive them. When we want to make a good impression, we make sure that our home is clean, that we have refreshments to offer our guests, and that we will be ready when they arrive. When we invite our friends to our church, we first need to get ready to receive them. Make sure that you read and use “Welcoming Guests Well” on page 1-7 as part of any ***Friendship Ablaze!*** activity.

2. Follow-up

A friendship evangelism event is not over when it is over. Any event or ministry which attracts guests is not the end of the church’s work. It is the beginning. Building a relationship with the guest through thoughtful, planned contact following the event is important. Before planning your actual ***Friendship Ablaze!*** event, use “Developing a Follow-up Strategy” on page 1-12 to plan the follow-up steps that will work best in your situation.

Here’s a brief description of each of the many ***Friendship Ablaze!*** items in this collection:

Planning Guides: These three planning guides walk you through the three major components that need to be planned.

Welcoming Guests Well--step by step instructions on how to get ready to welcome guests, a key part of any plan. See page 1-7.

Developing an Intentional Follow-up Strategy—step by step instructions regarding a second key step, that of following-up on the people who come as guests. Includes a survey you might want to have guests complete, and also suggestions for further reading. See page 1-12.

Planning Guide for Friendship Sunday—Friendship Sunday is the day members bring their unchurched friends to worship. This guide walks you through the preparation for this event. See page 1-18.

Worship: Many items are included for a Friendship Sunday series, and for a friendship evangelism emphasis throughout the year. All these worship items are in the PDF document ***Friendship Ablaze!*** Section 2.

Materials for a 4 week series culminating in Friendship Sunday

Sermon outlines

PowerPoint presentations for the sermons

Children’s messages that carry out the theme of the sermons

Drama/illustration/movie clip resources—where to find these resources; information on licensing to use copyright material

Prayer bulletin inserts—half page bulletin inserts encouraging prayer support for Friendship Sunday

Sample invitation card, and an invitation Sunday School children can use.

Worship Resources for use throughout the year

Five suggested ***Friendship Ablaze!*** themes with additional sermon ideas and prayers for use as you continue the ***Friendship Ablaze!*** emphasis throughout the year.

Bulletin notes—short paragraphs to put in the bulletin regarding Friendship Sunday

Bible Studies—***Friendship Ablaze!*** Section 3 contains five Bible studies for individual or group use.

Prayer—***Friendship Ablaze!*** Section 4 focuses on prayer, another key component as we seek to introduce our friends to Jesus. Two items are included:

Prayer plan—a tool to be used by individuals or groups to grow their prayer life. A sample Prayer Journal page is included.

Prayer vigil—plans for a congregational prayer vigil in support of the ***Friendship Ablaze!*** event.

Assimilation Guide—Is your congregation ready to assimilate guests into the life of the church? ***Friendship Ablaze!*** Section 5 covers all aspects of the process.

Schools—***Friendship Ablaze!*** Section 6 contains the following practical resources for helping Lutheran day schools focus on outreach.

Children’s Ministry ***Ablaze!***

Why a Lutheran school?

Lutheran Schools Sharing Jesus

How to be Visitor-Friendly

Visitor Flow Chart

How Schools Impact Non-members

Witnessing to Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs

Witnessing Suggestions for Public School Teachers

Directory of Welcoming Schools

Evangelism in Lutheran Schools—(PowerPoint presentation with accompanying notes)

Resources for Lutheran Schools

Supplemental Resources—***Friendship Ablaze!*** Section 7 contains further resources to support your ***Friendship Ablaze!*** emphasis

Emerging Church Evangelism Resources

Effectively Reaching Your Community—how to obtain information about your community and use it for outreach

Links to:

Spiritual gift resources

Groups Ablaze!--training for using small groups as an effective outreach tool

Congregational Models—congregations effectively reaching their community

Prospect Keeper—a free database for follow-up on prospects

The “Andrew Principle” handout to help members identify and reach their friends

Welcoming Guests Well

Welcoming the Stranger: It's God's way!

From the Word. Read Deuteronomy 10:17-19. (*Some translations use the word "stranger," some "sojourner," some "alien." They all refer to the presence of one who is not a member of the group, but is a guest.*)

What does this text tell you about God's attitude toward the stranger or guest in our midst?

About how God wants His people to look at these strangers/guests?

Read Hebrews 13:1-2. What is the key thought here?

All congregations believe they are friendly. But note this important rule of thumb:

If our guests don't think we're friendly, we aren't.

Discuss: Think back to when you first visited your congregation or any congregation. What made you feel welcome? What made you uncomfortable?

Welcoming Guests Well

A. A Welcoming Checklist:

Some time ago, a number of congregations were identified as welcoming congregations, churches effective in outreach. They were of all sizes, from small to large, from single staff to



multiple staff, and they were from all settings, rural to urban to suburban. These churches were asked to list the ten most important things they did to make sure guests were welcomed well and made to feel at home, to give a good “first impression.”

The following list was compiled from their answers. The suggestions are not in any particular order of importance. Many items were mentioned a number of times.

1. Printed out, easy to follow order of worship with clear instructions
2. Good signage inside and outside the building
3. Welcome cards in the pew
4. Ushers who have a host mentality
5. Pastor greets people in the narthex before the service
6. A gift given to each guest; often a congregation coffee mug (*how Lutheran!*)
7. Children’s message (*communicates a caring attitude toward children*)
8. Greeters for children and parents as they walk in for Sunday School
9. Use of children’s choirs
10. Dedicated guest parking (*especially for holidays.*)
11. Parking lot attendants with brightly colored umbrellas for rainy Sundays
12. Variety in worship styles, balancing use of formal and informal liturgical styles
13. Sermons speaking the Gospel to today’s issues
14. Members are excited about their congregation, have a positive attitude, and are concerned about greeting guests.
15. Good sound system
16. Excellence in music
17. Name tags for members (*and they wear them!*)
18. Time of greeting at the beginning of each service (*in which people are encouraged to introduce themselves to someone they don’t know.*)
19. Timely follow up within 36 hours of the initial visit (*usually first by phone, followed by a home visit if the guest wishes*)
20. Worship attendance registration for all worshipers
21. Attractive folder telling about congregational life, possibly including how to become a member.
22. Easily identified guest information center (*mentioned by most congregations; listed as most important by several*)
23. Fellowship time before and after each service with coffee, cookies, etc.
24. In leading worship, pastor doesn’t take anything for granted. (*People know when to stand, sit, etc.*)
25. Three or four contacts are made with the guest during the week after their visit. (*Phone call, card, letter of invitation, possible home visit, note from a special ministry area, etc.*)
26. Designated members greet and visit with guests who are standing alone (*if it is everybody’s job, it really is nobody’s job.*)
27. In each service, pray for the unchurched in the community.
28. Periodically give members a simple brochure or pamphlet on when and how to invite

friends to worship.

29. Produce a worship schedule, especially for holiday seasons, that members are encouraged to give to unchurched friends and family members.
30. Help members become aware that there are guests every Sunday and to be open, friendly and helpful to everyone.
31. Involve youth in inviting their friends and friends' parents.
32. Intentionally plan guest follow up.
33. Pay attention to the congregation's friendliness and enthusiasm.
34. Do **not** ask guests to stand and identify themselves.
35. Have a clean, brightly appointed nursery, staffed with competent and caring help.

Now go back over this list and circle the items you are presently doing. Put an "X" on the items you would like your congregation to consider doing. What have you learned from this exercise?

B. The "Four Touch Rule"

This "rule" says guests should have at least four experiences of someone smiling at them, shaking their hand and welcoming them. The four touches are:

1. A host/greeter smiles, shakes their hand and welcomes them.
2. An usher smiles, welcomes them, offers a bulletin and assistance in finding a place to sit.
3. At a time of greeting at the beginning of the service, a fellow worshiper smiles at them, shakes their hand, welcomes them and introduces him/herself to the guest.
4. At the end of the service, the pastor greets and welcomes them as he greets all worshipers at the door.

Some congregations add a fifth "touch." They have hosts greet guests in the parking lot (assumes a dedicated guest parking area), welcoming them and giving them directions to the sanctuary.

Does your congregation observe The Four Touch Rule?

What fifth or sixth "touch" could you add?

Identifying Guests Well

There is no perfect and foolproof way to identify guests. Every strategy takes consistency and discipline. The size and setting of the congregation will influence how guests are identified. Generally, the larger the congregation, the more intentional you must be and the more effort is required.

Give your guests time to decide what they want you to know about them. Many guests will want to remain “anonymous” the first time or two they visit.

Make sure your guests have a readily accessible way to give you information when they decide to do so. This is why it is so important to consistently, every service, invite guests to do whatever the method of identifying guests might be, and to instruct them how to do it: fill out a card/friendship pad, etc.

In some congregations, when inviting guests to fill out a card, the pastor tells them, “No one from the congregation will come to your house unless you ask us to.”

Have all members fill out a worship attendance card or pew pad so guests aren’t singled out.

It is crucial to be sensitive to what works for your guests, not what works for you.

Some strategies for having guests register their presence:

- Pew cards that are put in the offering plate (give instructions)
- Friendship Pads in the pews (Again, instructions are given at each service)
- Guest Book (seems to be less and less effective)
- Ask guests to step to the Information Booth for a special gift and material

Hosts and Greeters

1. Must be trained (Concordia Publishing House has several training manuals for ushers and greeters. One is “Welcome to Our Church: A Handbook for Greeters and Ushers” by Annette Schroeder. Catalog #14-2111)
2. Must be intentional
3. Helpful if they serve before and after the service (and introduce guests to pastor)

Of the suggestions listed above, which are you already doing?

Is there a strategy or two you think would be helpful to add at your church?

Who would do that?

Following up on Guests Well

Follow-up is an important part of welcoming guests well. Refer to the planning guide “Developing an Intentional Follow-up Strategy” on page 1-12 for suggestions. Note:

- Plan the strategy that is right for your community and your guests.
- Plan immediate follow-up.
- Look for ways to serve them.
- Keep good records of your guests. If you are looking for a good software program for prospect record-keeping, Prospect Keeper is available free at <http://www.icro.net>.
- Build a relationship with them; get to know them and allow them to get to know you.
- Be patient. God’s timing is not our timing.

Conclusion

From what you have learned and discussed as you worked through this planning guide, what should your congregation:

Keep doing?

Start doing?

Stop doing?

Write “action items” – what will be done, who will do it, and the date by which it will be done.

Developing an Intentional Follow-up Strategy

The key to a church's effectiveness in kingdom-building is getting guests to return to our ministries a second and third time. It is important to develop and consistently execute a follow-up strategy for all events and ministries of your church that attract guests. **An event/ministry which attracts guests is not the end of the church's work. It is the beginning.**

Here are suggestions to help you make your follow-up ministry more intentional.

1. Develop a Prospect List

Every event/ministry of your church that attracts guests should include a way to garner names, addresses, email and phone numbers for your prospect list. A useful tool to help you begin or organize your prospect list is *Prospect Keeper*, a free application available for Windows XP, Windows 2000 and Macintosh OS X 10.2.8 or later. You can download this free application from Intelligent Church Resources Online at <http://www.icro.net>. *Prospect Keeper* also allows you to record your prospect's church home, previous visits, and the publicity that attracted them. You can include them in your mailing lists, record follow-up details and generate reports.

2. Prioritize Your Prospect List

While all guests who participate in our ministries are important, we recognize that some will be easier to reach with our unique God-given ministry than others. Since our time and resources are limited, we need to invest them well. Frequent guests of our ministry will most likely receive a higher priority. Guests who are new to our neighborhood and are visiting us for the first time will initially be given a higher priority than a guest from across town.

Each year you should set a goal to move x number of prospects into regular worship in your congregation. The size of your congregation will dictate the number of prospects in your goal. Trust God, and be both bold and realistic in setting this goal. Communicate your goal to the congregation, monitor your progress and celebrate your victories.

3. Develop A Relational Follow-up Strategy

As you host *Friendship Ablaze!* Sundays and other guest-friendly events and ministries during the year, it is important that you decide in advance how you will follow up with the guests who participate in your ministry. The follow-up should be highly relational and focused on the guest. In reality, the follow-up begins the moment the guest enters our midst. What first impression do

you want your guests to have of your church? The goal is to be a friendly church and present yourself that way.

Plan your follow-up:

- Determine the type of follow-up visits your follow-up team will make.
- Identify follow-up teams in advance.
- Train your follow-up teams.
- Use your follow-up teams as part of the greeters on your special Sundays.

Begin your follow-up well:

- In the Sundays leading up to your special event, prepare members to be guest friendly on that day.
- Have greeters in the parking lot to create a positive, friendly atmosphere.
- Place greeters at the entrance of the church.
- Greeters and ushers should wear name tags.
- Include friendly ushers who smile, welcome and help guests find seats.
- Include a pastoral greeting at the beginning of the service for all in attendance.
- Design a community-oriented event. If the event includes worship, select high-energy songs that are easy to sing. Keep the service and sermon brief and to the point.
- Greeters should reconnect with guests at the end of the service. This connection is vital if your event includes a fellowship following the service.
- Greeters should introduce guests to members of the congregation. A guest should never be left alone at our fellowship.

Follow-up Visits:

Dr. Kennon Callahan, in his book *Visiting In The Age Of Mission: A Handbook For Person-To-Person Ministry*, teaches us that visits take many forms. Initial follow-up visits should be carried out by members of the church, not the pastor or other paid staff.

The initial follow-up visit should take place within 36 hours of the event; ideally, the same afternoon. If the follow-up team served as greeters, it would be helpful if they follow-up with people with whom they interacted during the event.

The initial follow-up visit may be:

- A brief front-porch visit
- A personal, relational phone call
- A personal, relational handwritten card

If your initial follow-up is a brief front-porch visit or phone call, follow-up with a second visit via a handwritten note/card sent later in the same week.

If your initial follow-up is a handwritten note card sent either via the mail or left at the home, follow-up with a second visit either using a brief front porch visit or personal phone call.

Guests who visit with our ministry a second time within the following weeks of our special event should receive a second follow-up visit, preferably from the same person who performed the initial follow-up. This visit should be either a personal front porch visit or personal phone call. In this second visit, the person visiting with the guest should ask if it would be okay to have the pastor or other key paid staff person make a follow-up call or visit with the guest. If the guest responds positively to having the contact from the pastor or staff, it is essential that the follow-up take place within the same week.

A sample Guest Survey and suggestions for its use are on page 1-16.

Our follow-up strategy should continue with guests until they become regular in attendance in our worship. Guests will teach us when they no longer consider themselves to be guests.

4. Update Your Prospect List

When following up, members of your follow-up team should complete detailed reports of their visits. The reports should include the name of the guest, the date and type of the follow-up, notes and, if applicable, the intended date and type of the next follow-up. *Prospect Keeper* includes fields for tracking this data and will print a report including all follow-up details related to a specific guest.

As you update your prospect list, you may also re-prioritize your prospects, change mailing preferences and update notes.

5. Include Your Prospects on Your Mailing Lists

It is helpful to send prospects information about your ministry. Mailings may include newsletters, devotional material, general announcements of ministry events and special occasions, personal invitations, etc.

In addition to personal invitations, those prospects who are given an urgent or high priority should receive a personal phone call inviting them to be your guests at special events/occasions.

6. Be Intentional and Consistent

- Monitor your goal for moving prospects into regular worship with you.
- Every event should have a strategy for follow-up.

- Plan only as many special events/occasions for which you have resources to follow-up. The goal is to be focused and intentional as we use our resources wisely. Remember the Pareto Principle: 20% of what we do gets 80% of our results. 80% of what we do gets 20% of our results. We want to increase our effectiveness by focusing on the 20% that gets 80% of our results.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your events and your follow-up strategy.
- Strive for excellence in your events and your follow-up.
- Celebrate and thank those who help execute your events and follow-up strategies.
- Focus on developing relationships within your congregation, your community and with your guests.
- Learn more about the emerging culture and what reaches people today.
- Trust the power of the Word and the Holy Spirit to draw people into God's grace.

Resources for Intentional Follow-up

Callahan, Kennon L. *Visiting In An Age Of Mission: A Handbook For Person-To-Person Ministry*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1994.

Callahan, Kennon L. *The Future That Has Come: New Possibilities For Reaching And Growing The Grass Roots*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, Inc., 2002.

Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity For New Generations*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003.

McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions For The Church*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2003.

Rainer, Thom S. *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret For Keeping People In Your Church*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999.

Rainer, Thom S. *Surprising Insights From The Unchurched And Proven Ways to Reach Them*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001.

Rainer, Thom S. *The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages As Keys To Sharing Your Faith*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003.

Easum, Bill. *Leadership On The Otherside: No Rules, Just Clues*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.



Guest Survey

(A survey can be useful as it reveals what the guest has noticed about your church. Before using it however, discuss and decide the best way to use it. Do not hand it out the day of the event, or mail it immediately to visitors—that can detract from personalized, relational follow-up, giving the guest the impression that they are little more than a statistic. Instead, use it in a second follow-up visit, or have a follow-up phone caller ask these questions informally in a phone call, or reserve the survey for guests who don't continue to worship with you.)

[Church Name] welcomes you to our special celebration. We're very glad you're here!

Please take a moment to help us by answering the following:

1. Did you find the church easily? ___ Yes ___ No
2. Did our signs assist you in finding your way around the building?
___ Yes ___ No
3. Were you greeted upon entering the building? ___ Yes ___ No
4. Were you ushered to a seat in the church? ___ Yes ___ No
5. Did you find the people of the church friendly? ___ Yes ___ No
6. Did you have difficulty finding a parking space? ___ Yes ___ No
7. Did your children or youth attend "Sunday School?" ___ Yes ___ No ___ NA

If not, why not? _____

If so, were you able to find their classrooms easily? ___ Yes ___ No

8. Were you able to follow the order of service easily? ___ Yes ___ No
9. Were you invited to return again? ___ Yes ___ No
10. Would you consider returning again? ___ Yes ___ No

If yes, which types of opportunities would you be interested in? Check all that apply.

- ___ Worship
- ___ Seminars
- ___ Family events
- ___ Youth events

- Children's events
- Support groups
- Musical events
- Community Service

In order to best meet your needs, could you please provide us with contact information?

Name _____

Phone Number: Home () _____ Cell () _____

Email address _____

What is the best time to reach you? _____

Friendship Sunday Planning

Start with a task force that is planning the overall *Friendship Ablaze!* emphasis, including getting ready for guests and intentional follow-up. One or two people on that task force should be responsible for the actual Friendship Sunday event. They should gather a team of people to help them with the planning and carrying out of the event as outlined on this checklist.

Step 1: Getting Ready – 8 weeks before

This is probably the most important step in your planning.

- Staff and leadership begin to pray for the Lord’s guidance for *Friendship Ablaze!* planning.
- Assemble a planning team to accomplish these tasks. In some congregations, a team member may perform more than one of these tasks.

Team Leader _____

Secretary/Treasurer _____

Publicity Coordinator _____

Follow-Up Coordinator _____

Ministry representatives (to integrate the event through all ministry areas):

Day School _____

Sunday School _____

Youth _____

Adults _____

Staff Advisor _____

Other (example: food coordinator) _____

Each position should be filled by someone with:

- a commitment to outreach
- leadership skills
- an ability to recruit others to assist in their areas

- Before the first planning meeting, team members need to carefully read ***Friendship Ablaze!*** materials for all areas of the emphasis so that they understand the bigger picture into which their particular work will be placed.
- Develop prayer support and a prayer list for ***Friendship Ablaze!*** so congregation members feel ownership in the planning. See Section 4.
- Select a date for your Celebration and distribute timeline calendars to team, staff, board chairs, and ministry leaders.
- Prepare mailing labels for a congregational mailing with a letter from the pastor casting the ***Friendship Ablaze!*** vision and garnering their prayer and participation.
- Mail information to people in your visitor database, and those who may have attended events in the past year (i.e. VBS, seminars, concerts, fellowship events, etc).
- Select Bible studies (see Section 3) to be used in the weeks prior to the celebration.
- Develop sermons and children's sermons. See Section 2.
- Enlist children, youth, adult and school leaders/teachers to coordinate their lessons with the celebration theme. See Section 6
- Plan one or more witnessing workshops or classes to train members to share their faith more confidently and effectively. The "Share Life" kit, available from Concordia Publishing House, is a good witnessing training. Your regional or national denominational office may also have resources available.
- Have pastor and worship team plan special worship service utilizing resources provided (Section 2). Plan for all elements (sermon, children's sermon, music, order of service, bulletins, etc.) to be as visitor-friendly as possible.
- Follow-up Coordinator to recruit a follow-up team and determine type of follow-up to be used for this event.
- Set evaluation date following the event based on desired outcomes for this event.
- Other _____

Step 2: Publicity – 6 weeks before

Publicizing and promoting your celebration is a crucial task, as is involving your members. Involve as many as possible.

- Write articles for church newsletter, bulletin and website.
- Place attractive posters in your church and community.
- Make an attractive flyer and/or postcard available to members to give to friends and distribute in the community.
- Prepare a church lawn banner.
- Develop a simple, attractive brochure outlining the congregation's ministries to be distributed at the celebration.
- Advertise in the local newspapers, on radio and TV, and on your website. A human interest story in the newspaper is especially compelling. Use as many venues as possible.
- Use bulletin inserts and other ***Friendship Ablaze!*** resources to encourage members to catch the vision.
- Use personal testimonies during worship leading up to the celebration. Have a new church member who was brought to the congregation by a friend tell what that meant to them.
- Present short skits demonstrating inviting a friend or sharing a faith story.

Step 3: Equipping Members – 4 weeks before

The goal of your ***Friendship Ablaze!*** celebration is to encourage your members to share the Gospel with as many unchurched people as possible.

- Before the celebration, offer ***Friendship Ablaze!*** Bible study opportunities throughout the congregation for all ages. (Section 3)
- Use special worship resources (Section 2) in the three weeks prior to Friendship Sunday.
- Help members identify unchurched family, friends, neighbors, co-workers they can witness to and invite.

- Develop “invitations” (flyers/postcards) for members to use when they invite their friends.
- Encourage and enlist all children and youth to invite their unchurched friends as well.
- Pray that members will be bold in their witness and their inviting and that God would soften the hearts of those invited.
- Remind members to build on relationships that already exist with unchurched friends.
- Provide invitation commitment forms for members. “I will invite _____.”
- Invite identified friends to come to the celebration.
- Consider “canvassing” the neighborhood with invitations.
- Remind members of their on-going follow-up responsibility to invited friends and assist them with ideas to accomplish this.
- Train follow-up team to make follow-up visits with guests.

Step 4: Getting Ready for Guests – 3 weeks before

Are you ready for company? See the detailed information in “Welcoming Guests Well” (page 1-7). Note these tasks, for example.

- Several weeks before your celebration, take a tour of your entire facility looking at it from a visitor’s perspective. Spruce up as needed.
- Be sure the nursery is clean and well staffed.
- Be sure signs throughout the building are clear and concise.

Step 5: Friendship Ablaze! Celebration

All planned activities for your celebration should be designed to connect the guest to your friend, Jesus! Use your celebration as a springboard to an on-going focus on inviting unchurched friends

to your church throughout the year for worship and other special events. Keep good records on all visitors to make follow-up easier.

- Provide nametags for guests and members.
- Have everyone record their attendance, with guests encouraged to complete all contact information. Email addresses would also be very helpful for your visitor database. Give this information to the Follow-Up Team leader.
- Used trained greeters, ushers and parking attendants. Put all members on “high alert” to greet guests and invite them to return.
- Provide a small gift for each guest.
- Take photographs and/or video of your ***Friendship Ablaze!*** activities to share with your congregation after the event in newsletter follow-up articles or a special PowerPoint presentation.
- Provide a hospitality area with refreshments and information (brochure) about your church’s ministries.

Step 6: Follow-Up – within 1 week of the event

Three reasons follow-up is important:

1. It shows you care.
2. It builds and nurtures a relationship.
3. It provides opportunity to invite them back for other events.

A guest’s visit needs to be acknowledged in a timely manner, their needs identified, a return visit encouraged, and on-going contact and invitation to other church events extended. See “Developing an Intentional Follow-Up Strategy” (page 1-12) for details. Here’s some examples:

- Establish a database of all visitor information.
- Prioritize contacts for most effective follow-up.
- The follow-up team provides a plan for follow-up. This may include:
 - A thank you letter (with Adult Information class brochure included)
 - A phone call
 - A personal visit
 - An email contact with church web site address and information

- A newspaper article celebrating the event with pictures
 - A church display with pictures after the event
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- Personal contacts are made the week following the event, thanking visitors for attending and identifying needs they may have that the church may be able to help with. Record all contact information and responses.
 - Refer specific needs to appropriate staff or ministry leaders. Keep a record of all contacts and outcomes.
 - Provide any additional information requested verbally, via email or mail.
 - Provide members with ideas on ways to build on-going bridges of friendship to more adequately minister to friends' needs.
 - Continue offering witness training opportunities for your members throughout the year.
 - Put visitors on mailing or email list to receive information on future events.

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