



SEASON OF HOPE:

YOUR CHURCH'S FALL 2021 GROWTH OPPORTUNITY

BY RICH BIRCH



The coming months hold an unprecedented opportunity to see your church impact more people than ever before.

As the country begins to shake off the shackles of COVID-19 and the ensuing economic calamity, we're **seeing new windows of opportunity**. We must leverage this season for the message of Jesus.

We can echo what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:9, "*a great door for effective work has opened to me.*" Let's not miss this tremendous opportunity that is just around the corner!

Fall 2021 is when your church must invite more people to be a part of your community.

The difference between leading churches and languishing churches is that **leading churches motivate their people to invite their friends to church**. Whether it's in-person or online, churches that make an impact consistently find new ways to encourage their people to invite their friends to be a part of the church.

Typically, in the fall, we see growth opportunities as people reorient their lives and come up with new rhythms. It's sort of like a "second new year", particularly because many churches are trying to reach families and kids. The return to school drives how young families operate. This fall will be the first time that kids return to school and normal family life emerges from the haze of the pandemic that started in March 2020!

Let's not miss this opportunity, friends, and find ways to leverage this turning point to invite more friends than we ever have before.

As I've watched churches in this season, I've noted a disturbing trend. Some churches are leveraging *soft guilt* with their people about how important it is for them to "return to the building." **Churches that obsess about getting people to the building will ultimately lose the bigger picture.** It's a small vision to just get people back into the buildings they were in before March 2020. Let's cast a bigger vision and move beyond shame and motivating people to get into our boxes. I've heard too many churches leverage negative emotions to motivate people to return. Here are some lines that are being used:

- *"We know there's nothing like being in the room together."*
- *"It's time to return."*
- *"Our forefathers fought for your right to attend church. You can fight the couch and join us."*
- *"When the doors of the church are open, believers need to darken them!"*

I've even heard churches misquote passages like Psalm 122:1 [\[ref\]](#), which sets a dangerous precedent when we talk about our church buildings like the temple in the Old Testament. There's a theological point to be made that one of the things Jesus undid on the cross was the limitation of where the spirit of God chooses to move. On the cross, Jesus declared that he can move in any place and any season. **This needs to drive our mission in reaching new people, not a hyper-obsession with getting people who used to sit inside our boxes to come and sit in them again.**

Let's not miss this opportunity to encourage our people to invite their friends. As people reorient their lives, there are new opportunities for your church to invite people to be a part of your community, whether that's online or in-person.

There are all kinds of signs that travel will be at incredible levels over the summertime. As we approach Labor Day, it will begin to wane, and people will be looking to establish new patterns in their lives. **Let's create a positive community image with our people that will encourage them to come back and be a part of the good things that are happening in our churches.** Here are a few ways that you can leverage this fall to reach more people.

5 WAYS TO LEVERAGE FALL 2021 TO GROW YOUR CHURCH

Growing churches consistently motivate their people to be a part of the mission. At a bare minimum, they move people to invite their friends to be a part of the good things that God's doing in their lives. However, fall 2021 presents all kinds of opportunities for drawing people to church.

PACKAGE IT AS A SEASON.

Many churches will have individual series that may last for three to eight weeks. However, for communication purposes, I think churches should package fall 2021 as one branded season. String several series together to make a season with an informative title e.g., "Season of Hope", "Changing Seasons for the Better", or "Homecoming Season". We know that nothing builds momentum in a church like something new and so repackaging the fall, from a communications point of view, will build anticipation. It will also be the kind of thing that sparks people's curiosity and encourage them to invite their friends to be a part of it.

Through studies, we know that varying levels of COVID hesitancy will continue in our culture. [ref] Thus, rather than trying to drive everyone back to a single Sunday or a single series, branding the entire season gives a lot of on-ramps for people to connect with your church when they are ready.

LEVERAGE ALL THE "FIRSTS" AGAIN.

There's no doubt that during this fall your church will be doing several things for the first time in a long time. During the pandemic season, you may have attempted some of these; however, this fall will see us returning to a new normal and celebrating significant mile markers is important. They also create great opportunities for inviting friends to be a part of the church. For example:

- **Baptism.** While many churches have taken chances and flexed their creative muscles with performing fascinating and different baptism experiences over the last year-and-a-half, let's use this season as an opportunity to gather people together and celebrate the life changes that have taken place. This is a great opportunity for people to invite their friends.
- **Infant Dedications.** Perhaps your church doesn't normally feature these within your main weekend services; however, this might be a great time to break that tradition as baby dedications are a fantastic time to invite family and friends to come and be a part of your church.

- **Back to School Sunday.** Let's celebrate that most kids in the country will be back to in-person learning this fall and plan a special Sunday that celebrates teachers and students returning to class.
- **Christmas.** No doubt we'll be talking more about this in the coming months, but Christmas is at the end of the fall season and provides a massive opportunity for us to invite our friends and community, whether it's in-person or online, to connect with the message of Jesus.

DON'T MISS THE HALLOWEEN OPPORTUNITY.

October 31st can be a controversial day in the calendar. While I have no intention to get into the theological nuances around what Halloween means and whether Christians should even be a part of it, it does represent a unique opportunity for your people to connect with their community. (Looking for some information on this? [Click here to check out my friend Bruxy Cavey's notes on why Halloween is a great opportunity for you to connect with your community.](#))

For most of our families, Halloween will be the first time they'll connect with neighbors. **Resist the urge to do something at your church building and instead, mobilize your people to leverage this day as an opportunity to bless and care for their neighborhood.** Encourage them to get the full-size chocolate bars and invite family and friends to a fun family-oriented church event sometime in mid-November. Help your people with some practical instructions on how to engage with their neighbors. They could provide coffee for parents, or maybe something a little extra than what they would normally do.

This Halloween is a fascinating one because it lands on a Sunday! Your church could provide take-home kits that can be picked up on the Sunday before Halloween or on Halloween to help people leverage these days. **I'm not talking about handing out tracks.** What I'm talking about is helping our people engage positively in their neighborhoods. Think about it. In many communities across the country, you're going to have dozens of people come to the doors of the people in your church. How can we leverage this as an opportunity for the gospel?

CATALYZE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS.

One of the clearer outcomes of the COVID season has been the lack of social connections. It's almost like we need to teach people how to be friends again. This creates a great opportunity for our churches to be platforms upon which people can build relationships. Don't miss this opportunity to develop events and opportunities for your people to develop closer relationships with each other and invite friends to join. Here are some ideas:

- **What if your church hosted a tailgate party in the parking lot one Sunday after church?** Get everybody to wear their favorite team's jersey, and maybe invite people in to watch a game on that big screen that hasn't been put to much use over the last year-and-a-half.
- You could host a **fall family crafting day** where you invite families to bring their friends and put together a simple craft that they could do with their kids.
- If you want to go all out, I know some churches leverage the fall with a **firework spectacular**, which is a great way to kick off the night before school starts this year. Set up an outdoor stage and have your band play all kinds of songs off the radio. Hand out invites to an upcoming series and just as the sun begins to sink, set off some dazzling fireworks.

GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY.

Church has never been about the buildings. Resist the urge to communicate (subtly or blatantly) that you want to get people back into your rooms. There is nothing magical about your building. God wants to do work in your community. In fact, the balance of scriptural evidence is that **God seems to prefer to work outside of holy buildings rather than within them.** Think about any of the major characters in scripture and where God connected with them. Most of them were in the marketplace, fishing, or tending their sheep. They were out in the real world. Let's mobilize our people to get out of their seats and into the street.

- **What if this fall you attempted to mobilize 70-plus percent of your church to make a difference in your community?** Connect with a local civic leader and find out what your community's needs are and how the church can help fulfil them. What would happen if your church mobilized hundreds of volunteers, tens of thousands of dollars, and thousands of people-hours to make a tangible difference in your community? What a great opportunity for you to show your community that the church is re-gathering, but not re-gathering to get people to enter our buildings; rather, re-gathering to get out into the streets and bless the community!
- Maybe there's a way to give back to **first responders or to long-term care homes** that have been negatively impacted in this season. Or maybe there's a way to give back to schools as they relaunch in-person learning in a significant way. Pull together your leaders and get creative. Find ways to make a difference this fall in your community.

Packaging all these things up into a single season for your church would create an incredible number of new opportunities for your people to invite their friends.

Branding them all within a single unified theme would give them a cohesiveness that will build momentum to move from one to the next.

Don't miss this opportunity that's just around the corner! None of us has ever come back from a pandemic but let's not just whimper into what's next but look for a way to accelerate and move forward the mission that God's called our church to.

WANT MORE HELP?

ASK CAREY NIEUWHOF YOUR CHURCH GROWTH QUESTIONS.

On June 10th, we're hosting a special live online event with Carey Nieuwhof where you'll have the opportunity to ask him questions about church growth.

For years, he's been studying churches that grow and make an impact. During this event, you'll have an opportunity to get your questions answered. Want to know how to mobilize more people towards your mission? Wondering what you could do to encourage people to be a part of what God's called your church to do?

Join us at this free live online event. [To learn more or register, click here.](#) If you're reading this after the live event, you could also follow the same link to see the recording of our time together.