

Suggestions for doing a Major Community Sunday

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with a focus on social service agencies in the community

1. Set up a planning team well in advance. Prepare thoroughly and with enthusiasm.
2. Identify the agencies you will invite - perhaps there are five or so in your community (eg, youth drop-in centre, shelter for women, meals-on-wheels, children's services, ministry with homeless people, home care, etc).
3. Invitations
 - Invite all staff and volunteers working for the agencies.
 - Make invitations warm and welcoming, with clear information.
 - Use a personal approach (by phone or mail to directors of agencies and selected individuals) as well as a broader mailing. Confirm with directors of agencies by phone the week before the worship service.
 - Convey the intention of the congregation in holding this service: "Our congregation wants to recognize and celebrate the valuable service provided by the staff and volunteers of your agency. We wish to thank you for your service to our community."

Celebrating Major Community Sundays

A Major Community Sunday is a special Sunday when the congregation invites people from the community to join in worship. The worship service features a particular segment or interest group in the community such as all high school graduates in a given year, or first year retirees, or families with newborns. It may focus on people who have been bereaved during that year, or who are newcomers in the community. It may celebrate the services of community workers - teachers and educators, social and home care workers, volunteers, medical people, police or firefighters.

The term "Major Community Sunday" comes from Dr. Kennon Callahan who has been key facilitator at many of our church's Stewards by Design conferences. The concept is discussed in his book, *Giving and Stewardship in an Effective Church*.*

According to Callahan, a Major Community Sunday is the church's gift to the community. Churches already do two of these each year - at Christmas and Easter. "Easter," Callahan says, "is God's way of teaching you your future." The people who come at Easter and Christmas are telling you that if they had a church home, it would be yours. If done with integrity, people will see the church as a resource in the community. They may make it their home in the future. More importantly, they will know that the church cares.

Some congregations do a Major Community Sunday on a regular basis. For instance, one Presbyterian congregation has, for many years, held a 'civic recognition day.' It is a big success - the church is always packed, the mayor attends, it is a day of celebrating the gifts of the community.

Callahan suggests that congregations work towards doing eight to ten Major Community Sundays every year.

Do you have a story to share about a Major Community Sunday that your congregation has hosted? What was its focus, how did you organize it, how did you do the inviting, how was the worship service done, what were the benefits? **Please send your stories to us so that we can share them with others.** Email them to aklassen@presbyterian.ca or send them to us by mail.

* *Giving and Stewardship in an Effective Church* and other excellent books by Kennon Callahan are available from The Book Room at 416-441-1111; 1-800-619-7301; bookroom@presbyterian.ca.

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4. The Community Sunday Worship Service
 - Invite the service agencies to bring a display of their work for the church narthex.
 - Organize a group of people to welcome the visitors as they arrive. Make sure there are sufficient people to do the welcoming. Brief them on the fine art of hospitality and welcome. Decide on where the visitors will be seated. A name tag for visitors, indicating the agency they represent, would be appropriate. In this case, you would also want to have name tags for your congregation.
 - The entire worship service should be geared around the visitors and the value of their service to the community. (Do your congregational 'in house' work the week before or after this Sunday.)
 - Include the visitors and their ministries in the prayers and the liturgies.
 - Build the sermon around the service ministries represented, and the value of their work.
 - Display symbols of their work on the communion table for dedication during the service.
 - Involve children and youth in the service.
 - Have a moment of appreciation: Guests may stand to be recognized; give each a personal gift and each agency an attractive keepsake for the office (the children could do the presentations).
 - Invite people in your congregation who are involved in similar work to stand as well.
 - Make this a warm, joy-filled service with music that will be appealing and appreciated by all. This is your gift to the community!
5. After the worship service
 - Hold an informal social time with excellent refreshments.
 - Decorate the space to provide an atmosphere of celebration.
 - A luncheon for the visitors may work well.
6. During the week following the Major Community Sunday
 - Send a letter to the service agencies represented, thanking them for their participation. Let them know that this was a wonderful experience for your congregation. Note that your congregation looks forward to future opportunities for dialogue and service in the community.
 - The task force that planned the Major Community Sunday should do an evaluation that will be written up and put into a file (for the benefit of the next Major Community Sunday). This will include things such as: what we learned, what worked well, what could be improved next time, recommendations regarding follow-up arising out of the encounters with the visitors. If there are recommendations regarding ministry follow-up opportunities, present them to the session for review and possible implementation.