

GET OTHERS INVOLVED

Begin by praying and asking God's guidance to help you do His will. Seek our Lord's counsel as well as that of others. Don't take on the planning of a festival by yourself. The opinions, ideas, and suggestions of others are invaluable. Ask those who are the most involved in their particular lay ministry for ideas, and perhaps even ask them to be a member of your planning committee or your council of advice. As mobile as the world is today you should have no difficulty finding someone who has helped create a successful festival before. Find out who has specific expertise that you will need. Ask your priest or someone on the Bishop's staff to give you names of those they believe would support a festival and be willing to help you with the responsibility. Choose assistants that reflect the scope of the festival. That is, if it is to be a diocesan festival, get members involved from different parishes. Remember that their enthusiasm and personal commitment will motivate others to attend. Involve representative churches if it is to be an ecumenical festival. But above all, once you have volunteers to help with the festival be sure to delegate your authority and show them that you have confidence that they will do their job. Keep an atmosphere of open planning and encourage input. It is also very important to be flexible. If for some reason the plans that were made meet with immovable obstacles, be willing to re-evaluate the situation and consider alternatives

PICK A DATE

Plan ahead and give yourself plenty of time to deal with problems. Then after careful consideration decide what part of the year is best for the event. Too cold in the winter? Too rainy in the spring? Too hot in the summer? Too windy in the fall? The best season will, of course, vary for different parts of the nation. Consider whether this is to be an indoor or outdoor event. You will also want to keep in mind the liturgical season. Many will find a joyous festival uncomfortable during Lent. The same might be true of a contemplative event during Christmastide. Pick the best time of the year for the type of festival you are planning and then find a good date. The best day to choose is a well-known feast. Candlemas, the Annunciation, Saint Michael and All Angels, Holy Cross Day, are all good examples of feasts that can give your festival a focus. Lent, Ember Days, and Advent are times of fasting when your gathering could incorporate an introspective theme. If you particularly like All Saints Day, but it falls this year on Tuesday (which is a bad day for acolytes to be out late at night), then you should consider asking the Bishop to give his consent to transferring the feast to the weekend. Or if you just want to have your festival on a Friday, look through the church calendar to see what major feast falls on a Friday and choose that Friday. Avoid very busy times like Easter Sunday, Christmas Even, and the Diocesan council. And ALWAYS give yourself 3 to 6 months preparation.

FIND A PLACE

After a good deal of prayerful planning regarding the best date to have the festival, the next major decision is where to have it. The most obvious location is the place that is most convenient for the majority of those you want to attend. If this is to be a diocesan-wide affair your best bet is probably the cathedral. Most of the clergy, acolytes, and layreaders of the diocese will already know how to get there and many will also be familiar with the nearest and best accommodations. And, too, most cathedrals are large enough to house multiparish activities. However, if the cathedral is either not available or unsuitable, a good alternative is a large parish in the See city or other metropolitan area. Or perhaps you want to limit your festival to a specific part of the diocese, or contiguous parishes, then a centralized parish large enough to seat and/or feed the expected number of participants is best. There are two primary criteria that must take precedence over all other considerations. (1) Is the site easily accessible by automobile with well-marked intersections and adequate parking? The ease of arrival is critical to successful attendance. Although there may be alternative forms of transportation (air, rail, bus) most folks still prefer to drive. (2) Is the Rector (or Vicar) willing to enthusiastically sponsor your festival? Make sure that your hosts are as interested and motivated as you. Don't be shy about including a member of the host parish on your committee.

SET A TIME

Now that you have a date and a host, you must pinpoint the time of day that your festival will commence and finish. This is best done in cooperation with the host parish. The Rector will be able to tell you when his plant is presently scheduled for use on the date you have chosen and when your activities could be scheduled. If a schedule conflict exists there are always alternatives. Perhaps choosing another date, or amending the program to utilize the accommodations that are available would be preferable to choosing an alternate site. If there is no conflict, you are free to determine what times will be best for your participants or activities. Must people drive a long way to attend? In that case consider beginning late in the morning or at noon, or spreading the events over two or more days. Week-day evenings are usually easier for adult laity to attend, whereas the weekend may be better for students and children. The clergy will find attendance easier to fit into their schedules if it takes place during daily working hours. The time you set will have a critical effect upon attendance. The festival must be long enough to make the effort worthwhile, yet short enough to be convenient to the normal, daily schedule of obligations each of us has to our job, family, and school. Remember, too, that the human body has definite limitations on the amount of information absorbed and the length of sitting endured. Beginning too early or ending too late will have a direct effect upon participation and enjoyment.

CHOOSE A FORMAT

Does your committee prefer a formal or informal format? That is, do you see this festival as having scheduled workshops, solemn worship, catered luncheon? Or will your theme be better served by having ongoing demonstrations in which the observers are free to walk in and out, a "low" service, and a brown bag lunch? A determining factor in this decision will depend upon whether you intend to charge a fee for your festival or not. Unless you have a benefactor the formal format will more likely involve more cost than the informal one. There is no right or wrong decision here since it all depends upon how you envision the event being the most successful and the mind-set of the prospective participants. The age range of those attending may determine your format. It is obvious that youngsters can easily sit on the floor, where oldsters usually prefer tables and chairs. Keep in mind your potential activities as you determine format. Indoor activities are more easily formal. It is difficult to convince someone in a coat and tie to sit on a picnic bench or go hiking through the woods. The most likely weather in your area should also be kept in mind if outdoor activities are planned. Be sure to determine the format of your festival soon after you have secured the date, time, and place. This will give you the necessary time to make the rest of your arrangements and broadcast the event to ensure maximum attendance. Now that the preliminaries are done you can begin to earnest.

SCHEDULE ACTIVITIES

Now comes the most difficult part of the festival: determining the program. You need to fill the day with interesting and meaningful activities while keeping in mind the limitations of the human mind and body. First, decide on a specific theme. Use the feast day or the liturgical season as your theme or as a background to emphasize the theme. It is always best to begin or end a festival with the Holy Eucharist. The appropriate Office can be used for the other end of the festivities. You and your fellow organizers can staff the opening service, but you will generate more enthusiasm from the participants if you invite them to assist with the closing service. If the festival is longer than one day in length be sure to provide for daily communion as an option for those who keep this daily Rule of Life. Also remember those who abstain or fast on Fridays. Even though this may not be your piety, your thoughtfulness can only help to enhance the event. Perhaps a great procession is appropriate for a feast day such as Corpus Christi or the Assumption. (Be sure to check with the city since parade permits are usually required for outdoor processions.) Build the liturgy of the Eucharist around the theme. The Bishop would make a good celebrant, the host Rector a good Emcee. Secure a Homilist who is well known or has a reputation for good preaching. A dinner speaker should be an expert on the theme and, of course, a spell-binder with words. Workshop leaders must have credentials.

INFORM AND INVITE

Once you have your activities scheduled and leaders/speakers confirmed, most of the grueling work is behind you. Publicity: however, is just as important as all of the previous decisions and actions. All of the hard work you have accomplished up until now, will be worthless if no one knows to come. Begin making general announcements about the festival approximately two to three months prior to the date of the event. It may be necessary to give the diocese at least six months notice in order to get your festival on the diocesan calendar. Have a spokesperson attend the diocesan council to announce to the assembled delegates. Notices can be made in the Bishop's newsletters, deanery mailings, and parish publications beginning at least eight weeks prior to the event. The most important rule here is not to let your potential participant's calendars fill up before you announce your festival. Four weeks prior to the date send out personal or chapter invitations especially if you are requiring reservations to be made. Make the RSVP deadline at least one week prior to the festival (this is the Amount of time usually required by most caterers and other service providers for a specified number). Plan ahead for last minute changes. A good rule of thumb is to plan for 3% more than have made reservations. This will give you the ability to be flexible with those who inevitably call at the last minute. Two weeks before be sure to re-confirm responsibilities with your host, workshop leaders, celebrant, speaker, etc.

PLANNING A FESTIVAL



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