



# UNWRAP the true meaning of CHRISTMAS

## Event Grant Planning Guide

**Thank you for partnering with us to host an Unwrap Christmas event!**

We are grateful that you've chosen to participate in this exciting effort to extend invitations to people in your community.

Spiritual seekers – individuals and families who do not have a church home, but are seeking hope, connections and deeper meaning in life – are present in every community around the world. Reaching out to them with messages of love and welcome greatly boosts the likelihood that they will visit your church's worship services or events to see if your congregation is a good fit for them. [Learn more about spiritual seekers through our research!](#)

An Unwrap Christmas event is an excellent way to reach out, and we pray that the work we do together will be a blessing to your church and community this year.

Are you ready to unwrap the true meaning of Christmas? We are! Let's get started! This planning guide will help you prepare for a successful event. Contact us with any questions at [LocalChurchServices@UMCom.org](mailto:LocalChurchServices@UMCom.org).

Sincerely,  
United Methodist Communications



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## Section 1: Planning an engaging, successful event

You've chosen to host an Unwrap Christmas event, thought about a concept and chosen a date. Now what?

### Set goals and establish a vision

Think about what you hope to accomplish. Take a moment to reflect on the following questions and make some notes so you can refer back to them later. Your answers will establish a guiding compass for your church as you plan your event.

1. Why is our church hosting an Unwrap Christmas event?

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2. Who are the spiritual seekers in our community who need to hear words of hope, love and welcome?

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3. How can we best connect with the community in a meaningful way?

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4. What results do we hope to see after the event?

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### Build your event's foundation

Before you begin any detailed planning or volunteer recruitment, determine the basic elements of your event. Identify the event basics:

- **Concept:** What type of outreach event are you hosting in the community? Could you be part of an existing community event via a booth, table, parade float, etc.? Or, do you have the resources and capacity to host a stand-alone event, such as a concert or service project opportunity?
- **Date:** When is your event? Have you checked community calendars to be sure the event will not conflict with other planned festivities in your area?
- **Location:** Where will you hold your event? Have you considered the need for permits, fees and/or reservations?
- **Budget:** What are the costs and from where will the funds come?
- **Support:** How many people should serve on a core leadership team? How many other volunteers will be necessary?



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## Build a team

After you have the event basics in mind, it's time to build a team to help make your goals, vision and event plans a reality! The size of your planning team depends on the scope of your event. Small events might only require three or four people, whereas large events might need 10.

Recruit planning team members through:

- Announcements in worship services, bulletins and newsletters
- Personal emails, texts and conversations
- Asking church staff members to help you identify people seeking opportunities to serve

Your message need not be complicated. Simply say something like this:

“Our church is planning an Unwrap Christmas event! It's a way to reach out to our community with messages of love and invitations to worship services and our holiday activities. I need help to be sure this event is a success. Would you be willing to be part of the planning team? It's a limited commitment. We'll be completely done before Christmas!”

## Engage your team

When you've identified the members of your planning team, host a meeting to get everyone plugged in.

At your first meeting, discuss:

- The goals and vision you've already established; see if your team members have more ideas to add. Remind the team that every event decision and plan needs to support these goals.
- The event basics you have identified, including which elements are solidified and which need to be confirmed.
- The event components that need to be considered and defined (see suggestions on page 5).
- Event checklists and planning timelines that you've already created (suggested checklists begin on page 5).
- Roles and responsibilities of each team member. Your event concept will determine these roles. After each team member has accepted a role, they might need to recruit others to help them accomplish the work for which they are responsible.

Roles might include:

- Recruiting volunteers
- Gathering supplies and/or refreshments
- Requesting donations from the congregation and area businesses
- Handling promotional efforts (internal *and* community awareness; see pages 11 and 13)
- Overseeing final logistics, including permits, fees, setup and cleanup
- Hosting day-of activities



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## Identify event components

The planning team should consider every element of the event to ensure all of the planning checklists are thorough. This will help prevent any forgotten items and last-minute surprises.

Build upon the event basics (concept, date, location, budget and volunteer needs) and think about the details, including:

- Start and end times (consider setup and cleanup)
- Agenda and activities of the day
  - What will people do at the event?
  - Are we including people of all ages and abilities?
  - Are our ideas realistic, considering budget and workload?
  - Should people register to attend the event?
  - Do we need special equipment or skilled help (i.e. a sound system or entertainer)?
  - Are medical release forms necessary? (If so, see templates on pages 19)
  - How should we handle photo-release permissions? (Learn more on pages 21)
- Volunteers
  - What will the work schedule look like?
  - How many people will we need to cover setup, all event activities and cleanup?
  - What is the registration/sign-up process?
  - What event-day check-in and hospitality will we need?
- Supply lists
  - What supplies will we need?
  - What items can we request as donations? What can we ask the congregation to donate? What local businesses might donate items?
  - What must we purchase?
- Logistics
  - What permits, fees, reservations or permissions are required?
  - How complicated will setup and cleanup be?
- Promotion
  - Can the event be easily promoted internally, to encourage volunteerism, donations (if needed), attendance and support?
  - Can the event be promoted on social media, area news outlets and community calendars?

## Planning checklists

The following checklists are simply guidelines to help you get started with event planning. Your event's concept, scope and details will greatly impact the final checklists your team will need.

Details about communication-related items on these lists are on pages 11-17.



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## 3+ months before your event:

- Establish your goals and vision
- Identify the event basics
- Recruit a planning team
- Host a planning team meeting to establish event details and assign roles
- Order customized invitation tools (see page 8)

## 2 months before your event:

- Flood internal communication channels with event information and volunteer requests
- Confirm completion of all logistics plans and requirements
- Request any necessary donations
- Identify the source for special equipment or talent
- Build a website landing page (if desired)
- Establish a Facebook event page and begin social media posts (see page 14)
- Post event information on community calendars and bulletin boards
- Identify an event photographer and/or videographer
- Contact United Methodist Communications to participate in enhanced spiritual seeker connection and event evaluation in order to access additional grant support in 2020 (see page 10)
- If you haven't already done so, order customized invitation tools
- Host a planning team meeting to ensure all plans are on track and no issues have arisen

## 1 month before your event:

- Begin purchasing supplies
- Assign day-of event roles to ensure all elements and activities are staffed
- Send a press release to local media outlets, your annual conference communicator and district superintendent
- Continue posting information on social media; encourage the congregation to help
- Establish a day-of media plan and designate a spokesperson
- Create a flyer or poster to hang in local businesses or on community bulletin boards
- Write volunteer talking points so they understand the key messages to deliver to event attendees; volunteers should be welcoming, friendly, invitational, and ready to talk about your church and upcoming worship services, events and activities
- Confirm all details with event venue
- Make plans for using customized invitational tools and pop-up tent



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## 2 weeks before your event:

- Send volunteers a confirmation email that includes talking points; host a training, if necessary
- Reach out to local reporters who might write a story about your event
- Continue posting information on social media
- Communicate internally about the importance of attending and supporting the event
- Ensure an event photographer and/or videographer is scheduled to attend
- Host a planning team meeting to ensure all plans are on track and no issues have arisen

## 1 week before your event:

- Gather additional supplies and refreshments
- Send volunteers a reminder email about their work schedule, check-in, role, etc.
- Continue posting information on social media; make a last push for engagement through a sponsored post
- Continue to reach out to local reporters who might write a story about your event

## Day before your event:

- Stage and pack supplies, donations, tables, etc.
- Send volunteers a final reminder email that includes their talking points
- Post final event reminders on social media
- Send an alert to local media outlets

## Day of your event:

- Deliver all supplies to the event site and complete setup
- Establish a volunteer check-in station; remind them about their specific role and talking points; give them invitation cards to distribute
- Watch for local news teams and connect them with your spokesperson
- Take photos and capture short video clips to use in post-event communications
- If necessary, gather medical release forms as people arrive
- Promote email subscriptions (*if* you elected to participate in enhanced spiritual seeker connections with United Methodist Communications)
- Continuously monitor volunteer stations to ensure you have enough help and no issues have arisen
- Clean up space as thoroughly as possible

## After your event:

- Host a volunteer celebration gathering to thank people for their time and to gather feedback, stories and concerns
- Host a planning team gathering as an extra chance to celebrate and evaluate the event
- Capture all feedback for reference when planning future outreach events
- Send stories, photos, event attendance numbers, details about your efforts, etc. to United Methodist Communications



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## Section 2: Using your grant

The materials you receive through your grant are tools that will help you reach out to the community successfully!

### Promotional materials

As soon as your event's details are confirmed, it's time to order customized invitational tools through our vendor, [Outreach.com/UMC](https://www.outreach.com). When your grant application was approved, you should have received an email with a link to order materials and a coupon code. You can order as many items as you want/need, but the coupon code will only cover **\$400** of your order total; your church will be responsible for the remaining costs.

Print tools, including banners, yard signs, invitation cards and T-shirts, are available in English and Spanish so that you can communicate in the language most used in the community. If both English and Spanish are spoken among people in your area, consider ordering resources in both languages.

We also offer a collection of free downloadable resources; learn more about these, as well as tips for using all of the grant-provided tools, below.

If you encounter any challenges with your order, Outreach.com has very helpful team members to assist you, or you can reach out to our team at [LocalChurchServices@UMCom.org](mailto:LocalChurchServices@UMCom.org).

United Methodist Communications will also provide a 10-by-10 pop-up tent and 6-foot tablecloth for use during your event!

### Using your materials

Because every outreach event is unique, the grant-provided customized promotional materials are adaptable so they can be used in a variety of ways.

#### Banner and yard sign

These items can be used in two ways:

1. If your event is a large or stand-alone event that you must promote heavily in order to draw attendance, customize these signs with details about your event.
2. If your event is part of a larger effort that will already have a lot of attendees (i.e., a float in a parade or a booth at a festival), customize these tools with information about upcoming worship services, events, activities and festivities that people might be interested in attending.

Hang the banner(s) and post yard signs in high-traffic locations; also consider distributing yard signs to congregants that live in different neighborhoods.

#### Invitation card

Volunteers will distribute invitation cards to people *during* your event, so the card should be customized with information about upcoming worship services, events, activities and festivities that people might be interested in attending.



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Invitation cards are very versatile! Volunteers can distribute the cards in a variety of ways. The only limit is your imagination. Here are a few ideas:

- Distribute them on their own, like a business card, along with a smile and a warm word of welcome
- Attach them to candy canes, packaged treats, Christmas ornaments, candy-filled small stockings, cups of cocoa, etc. and give them away as a holiday greeting
- If your Unwrap Christmas event is hosting a booth space at a larger community event, ask the event organizer to include the invitation cards in a registration packet or swag bag

### **T-shirts**

Customized, bright T-shirts will help volunteers stand out from the crowd. You can order these for your planning team members or for all of your volunteers.

Depending on the event's activities, you may also consider ordering several extra shirts to use as prizes or giveaways! This will help you get your church's logo out into the community even more. For example, instead of a cakewalk game, could you host a "shirt walk?"

### **Pop-up tent and tablecloth**

The grant-provided tent and tablecloth not only offer shade and rain protection, they also serve as vivid visuals during your event – and beyond. Place this setup in a prominent location where event attendees can easily see it. You want passersby to wonder what the tent might represent so they'll stop by to check out what you are doing.

The "Unwrap the True Meaning of Christmas" artwork is featured on one side of the tent and tablecloth, while the United Methodist Cross and Flame is featured on the other sides. We hope this design will allow you to use the tent and tablecloth in a wide variety of ways. Place the Christmas artwork facing the front for your Unwrap Christmas event and flip it to the back for other events throughout the year!

### **Downloadable graphics**

A folder of free downloadable graphics is also available through Outreach.com. This folder has a variety of digital files to support your promotional efforts.

### **Social media graphics:**

- Facebook allows several sizes of graphics to be posted, so we've included all of them in the download folder; see page 14 for more social media tips and information.
  - Your church's Facebook page and event-specific page can prominently feature the Unwrap Christmas logo as a page cover photo (this file is sized to 820-by-312 pixels).
  - You can use two different sizes of graphics (both a 1080-by-1080-pixel size square and a 1200-by-628-pixel size rectangle) when you're posting information about your event.
- Instagram, Twitter and Facebook all allow a 1080-by-1080-pixel size square graphic to be uploaded to accompany a status update, announcement, etc.



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## Worship graphics:

- We offer two sizes of PowerPoint slide graphics; choose the one that best fits the audio/visual needs at your church. You'll note a "title" slide and a "page" slide. Use both, one as an introductory slide and the other for subsequent slides, if you need to build a PowerPoint presentation to train volunteers, announce details about the event in worship services, or run a slideshow during your event!

**Art:** The Unwrap the True Meaning of Christmas logo/artwork is provided so that your church can customize additional print resources for the event. The file types offered are .jpg, .png, .pdf and .eps.

- If you need to feature the Unwrap Christmas logo on a flyer, bulletin insert, newsletter, website page, etc., a .jpg or .png is all you need. Your downloaded folder holds these logo files as well as digital files sized to 200-by-200 pixels and 600-by-300 pixels.
- If you choose to order custom giveaway items (i.e., water bottles, tote bags) or purchase advertising, your local printer/designer will need the .pdf or .eps files to set up your order.

## Extend your grant into 2020

Your grant benefits don't have to stop here. A bonus grant opportunity is available to churches who complete two extra steps with their outreach event. Churches will qualify if they:

1. Encourage 50 spiritual seekers to sign up for Compass (the spiritual seeker e-newsletter published by United Methodist Communications)
2. Complete a detailed post-event survey

Interested? Learn more by emailing Patty DelliBovi at [PDelliBovi@UMCom.org](mailto:PDelliBovi@UMCom.org).



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## Section 3: Building congregational awareness and volunteerism

Congregational support is vital when hosting an outreach event of any size. While you certainly need event volunteers, donated items, attendees and people to pray for your efforts, you also need *all* church members to be poised to welcome the people who will visit your church after the event.

Spiritual seekers are craving connections, community belonging and a warm welcome. Congregants must be ready to offer these essential elements to newcomers. If your congregation could use a hospitality boost, check out the [Welcoming Ministry online training](#) course.

### Internal messaging

People in the congregation must understand your event's core purpose before they can truly embrace their role in the event. Your messaging should always include the event's goals and vision (why you are hosting the event), followed by basic details and any requests. Be sure to offer a variety of opportunities for involvement so that everyone feels they can take part. Once you have a solid message, you can echo its key points in all future communications.

For example, something like this would work well as the initial member e-newsletter announcement about an outreach event:

#### **We're Unwrapping Christmas!**

Many people in our community yearn for hope and a place to discover the peace and joy of Christmas. Be a part of sharing a message of warm welcome and God's love! Our church will extend community invitations to our upcoming Christmas events and worship services by *[insert your event summation – i.e., hosting a table at the Jolly 5K, organizing a Carols in the Park concert, offering a booth at the Creative Christmas Art Show]*, and we need your help! We are seeking planning team members, volunteers, donated supplies, prayer warriors and event supporters. Watch this space for more detailed information coming your way soon! Contact *[your name and email address]* for further details.

Then, as you firm up details and need specific help, you can tailor your messages as a series. One e-newsletter might ask for volunteers, another for supplies, etc. For example:

#### **Smiles needed!**

Our Unwrap Christmas event on *[date]* will only be a success if we can connect with people in our community. We need YOU to be the light of Christ and a messenger of love by volunteering to talk about the great things happening at our church as you *[insert volunteer specifics – i.e., hand out cups of hot cocoa and invitation cards]*. Volunteers will work a one-hour shift during the event, which runs from *[insert time and place, i.e., 1 p.m. until 4 p.m. at Freedom Park]*. Sign up in the church welcome center or contact *[your name and email address]* for further details.



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Just before the event, you'll want to welcome everyone to participate, even if they didn't sign up to volunteer. For example:

### **Unwrap Christmas next week!**

Preparations are made for our Unwrap Christmas event next week on *[date, time]*! We still need volunteers. Please consider offering a couple hours of your time to share information about our church and our upcoming Christmas festivities. Even if you cannot volunteer during the event, we'd love to have you be a part of it by praying for our efforts and/or by attending! Wear a Smithtown UMC T-shirt and *[offer details about how they can participate – i.e. cheer on the 5K runners near our booth on 12<sup>th</sup> Street, drop by to encourage the volunteers working the table at the Township Christmas Festival]*. Thanks to everyone who has helped our dream of Christmas community outreach become a reality.

After the event, be sure to thank all of the volunteers, donors, event attendees, etc. Offer some information about how well the event was received by the community and ask for general feedback about the event. If you evaluate your efforts at this point, it will be easier to incorporate any needed improvements or changes when you begin planning your next outreach event.

### **Internal communication channels**

Your congregants have a wide variety of communication preferences. Use all of them to be sure everyone knows about your event. As soon as you have solid plans and needs identified, begin communicating internally. The more promotion, the more awareness you'll generate and the more help you'll receive.

Don't forget these key communication channels:

- Church newsletter – include a short promotional article in each issue leading up to, and directly after, your event
- Bulletin and worship announcements – ramp up frequency of announcements as the event draws closer; include information monthly, then every two weeks, then weekly
- Email and text messages – if your church hosts email and texting blasts, send one each month, then one the week before your event
- Signage – be creative to catch people's eye as they gather in busy spaces in your building; consider posters near water fountains or bathrooms, PowerPoint slides in pre-worship rotation or an information table with a volunteer signup sheet in the welcome center on Sunday mornings
- Website – including the event online will remind your congregation about your upcoming event and inform non-members about your plans if they happen to visit your website to find information about your church (see more website tips on page 13)
- Social media – handle internal communication on social media carefully – you don't want a lot of volunteer recruitment posts on your church's page because that is the page with which the community engages; since you are not asking for community volunteers, keep requests for donations and volunteers limited to closed Facebook groups, if you have them, and focus on general event information and invitations to attend the event on your main social media accounts (see more social media tips on page 14)



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## Section 4: Building awareness in the community

The key to building community awareness is honing in on where people are getting information in your local community. This is likely a mix of social media, local news outlets, community blogs, online annual conference and community calendars, and more.

As you already did with internal messaging, you'll want to define core external messages that can be shared consistently and repeatedly as you build awareness for your event.

Since this is an outreach event, every communication should have some positive words of invitation from your church to spiritual seekers, such as:

- Discover the joy and miracles of Christmas during Carols in the Park, hosted by Smithtown United Methodist Church.
- The gifts of joy and peace are already yours. Discover them at our Unwrap Christmas booth during the Township Christmas Fest!
- Our welcoming community wishes you a joyful Christmas! Watch for the Smithtown UMC float in the Holly Jolly Parade.

Much of the following information is extremely dependent upon what type of event you are planning. For example, if you are hosting a concert in a park, a lot of promotional communication will be necessary to draw a crowd. However, if your Unwrap Christmas event is hosting a booth at a popular local festival, you won't need to invest much time in promotion of the event; people will already be there. You might just focus on getting the word out about your presence and asking people to visit your booth location.

### Website landing page

A larger-scale event will need a central hub for delivering information and invitations. Your landing page should include:

- Words of invitation
- Basic details – name, date, time and location of the event
- Activities – be specific about what people can expect; be sure to include information about children's activities
- FAQ information – parking information, inclement weather plans, special-needs seating locations, etc.

Building a landing page to house this information on your website helps you in a few ways:

- You can include the page's web address in all social media posts, flyers, newsletters, press releases, etc. so people can learn more about your event; try to name your page something memorable and short such as: [SmithtownUMC.org/UnwrapChristmas](http://SmithtownUMC.org/UnwrapChristmas)
- When people in the community visit your website to find event information, they might also explore other pages, such as the homepage and about section; be sure the website is fully updated and ready for new visitors who want to learn about your church
- After the event, you can update the event page content, add photos and keep the page active as a way of displaying the type of fun community activities your church hosts; if you host the event next year, simply update the page with new information and reuse the page as your invitation page



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## Social media

Social media is an excellent way to boost awareness of and invitations to your event because many people in your community are already on social media. When promoting your event, it is important to use every social media channel on which your church is active.

This guide focuses on Facebook and Instagram, but you can find more social media tips and best practices via [recent webinars](#) (including a [Facebook events webinar](#)) and [MyCom articles](#) published by United Methodist Communications.

Facebook and Instagram posts need visuals to accompany them. Graphics or photos catch people's eye and boost engagement with your posts. Several Unwrap Christmas social media graphics are included in your free download folder from [Outreach.com/UMC](#), but when you need more visuals or photos, consider creating your own in a free program, such as [Canva](#), or finding free stock photos from a searchable website, such as [The Stocks](#).

## Facebook

Facebook is the most popular social media platform and offers you several options for event promotion. Work with an administrator of your church's page to be sure everything you post is hosted by your church, rather than your personal Facebook profile.

- [Event pages](#)  
Build an event-specific page with all of the details, a webpage address and other information, and post regular updates leading up to your event (three or four posts each week). Post photos of activities people can expect to find (i.e., a photo of a bounce house and a post that says, "Jump for joy! Carols in the Park is almost here!"), teasers about your plans (i.e., a photo of a cup of cocoa and a post that says, "Warm up with us at the Christmas Fest – don't miss our booth on Main Street!").
- [Church profile page](#)  
Your church's Facebook page can't house as many event updates because other, non-event content will need to be shared there. The profile page posts should focus on promoting your event page, ideally one post per week, so people will begin to follow that page.
- [Boosting posts](#)  
The 1200-by-628-pixel size rectangle graphic included in your event downloads can be boosted (or you can create your own with more specific event details; just be sure to limit the number of words on your image). This means you can write, create and [sponsor a post](#) so that more people in your community see it! You can set a budget, even \$5 is enough to help you engage more people, and set parameters – such as the geographic area you want the post to reach.

If your budget allows, boost a post for the week leading to your event. If you have a website landing page, don't forget to include the web address in your post so people can click through to your site to learn more.

You can also [boost your Facebook event page](#) to drive more awareness and interest!



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## Instagram

Instagram is a photo-sharing platform, so great graphics, visuals and photos are essential. Ask the administrator of your church's Instagram account to post event information about twice per week. If you are already creating posts for your Facebook profile and events pages, those can be used on Instagram as well!

During the week of your event, consider using the Instagram Stories feature. This is a fun way to share photos and short video segments about event preparation, day-of festivities, an interview with your pastor and more. People will like the "behind the scenes" sneak peek you are offering, and you can promote all of the exciting event elements that await attendees.

## Involve the congregation

Many church members are active on social media. Ask for their help in getting the word out about your event, especially on Facebook. Include this request in your internal communications in the month leading to your event. The more invitations are shared, the more engagement.

Ask the congregation to:

- Share event posts from your church's Facebook page on their personal pages, along with an invitational note
- Invite people – coworkers, neighbors, etc. – to follow your Facebook event page
- Share Facebook event posts and the event page in closed Facebook groups to which they belong – such as parenting, homeowner's association, neighborhood and special-interest groups
- Share event information on all their social media and digital networking accounts, such as Instagram, Nextdoor and Twitter

Congregants can also help with low-tech event awareness:

- Ask families in different neighborhoods to display an Unwrap Christmas yard sign
- Ask people who frequent local businesses or community-gathering places, such as the library, to hang flyers on community bulletin boards
- If anyone owns a business, ask them to hang signage on the front door or in a prominent location

## Free advertising

If your budget allows, paid advertising is certainly worth considering. The artwork files included in your free download folder can be used in your ad's design.

But if your budget won't cover advertising, don't worry. You can turn to some free options.

- Ask your planning team to help you canvas the area with flyers or posters; be sure to ask permission of business owners before hanging any signage!
- Post your event on online community calendars. Use a search engine to be sure you are aware of all options.
- If you know anyone who has a blog about community happenings, ask them to post information about your event. Be cautious, however, you only want positive awareness.



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## Publicity

Asking local media outlets to cover your story (your event) is a great way to increase awareness. Here are steps to take when working with the media:

1. Establish a spokesperson

Be prepared to speak to the media by establishing which church representative will talk to them. A pastor, lay leader or event leader are usually good options. Your spokesperson will need to be ready to talk about why your church is hosting this event and all the event details.

2. Send a press release

One month before your event, send a press release to all of the local newspapers, television stations and radio stations via email. Search each media outlet's website to locate email addresses for the news desk and any reporters who usually cover stories like yours (look for reporters covering religion, community, events or human interest). Your release should include a strong opening paragraph about your event and basic details, then follow with the "why" of your event, a quote from your spokesperson, any other pertinent information, the event webpage address and your contact information. Find a press release template on page 18.

Include your annual conference communicator and district superintendent on your contact list so that they are aware of your work (email addresses will be available on your annual conference's website). They might be of assistance in connecting you with reporters.

Also include an Unwrap Christmas logo (part of the free downloads folder from Outreach) or another image with your press release. For example, if your Unwrap Christmas event is a live Nativity scene that you've hosted previously, attach a couple of your best live Nativity scene photos from past events to your press release email.

3. Pitch your story

Two weeks before your event, forward your press release, with an additional personal note, to any reporters you feel would cover your story. Just say something like, "I wanted to be sure you received the information about Carols in the Park on December 12. If you'd like to set up an interview with our pastor, I would be happy to arrange that at your convenience."

4. Send a media alert

Send another email to your master contact list the day before your event as a reminder the event is tomorrow. Clearly outline the who/what/when/where/why about the event, and include the full press release and your direct contact information, including cellphone number.

5. Keep your eyes open

Sometimes, media outlets will send a photographer or videographer to an event unannounced so that the team can capture images and footage for a later story. If you spot a news crew, be very hospitable. Introduce yourself, ask if they are hoping to capture specific content and help them do so, and connect them with your spokesperson.



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6. Provide post-event updates

Just because a news crew didn't make it to your event doesn't mean the media outlet won't cover it. After your event, send a post-event update to your email contact list. Include your original press release, a collection of photos taken during the event and any additional information you can share, such as how many attendees were present, a quote from a keynote speaker, etc.



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## Section 5: Tools and templates

**Press release:** Use this template to guide you as you format and write a tailored press release that you can send to local media outlets (see page 16).

*[Insert Name of Church or Logo]*

**For Immediate Release**

*[Month Day, 2019]*

***[Catchy title, i.e., Delivering Christmas cheer, one carol at a time]***

***[City, State]*** – Joyful celebrations and loving community connections are perfect Christmas gifts. To fulfill these holiday wishes, *[insert your church name and event details – i.e., Smithtown United Methodist Church is unwrapping the true meaning of Christmas during a free Carols in the Park concert, on December 12 at 3 p.m. at Smithtown Park]*. Holiday cheer, hopeful inspiration and fellowship will be offered to all in attendance! Full details can be found at *[website (hyperlinked)]* or by calling *[phone #]*.

During the festivities, attendees will be invited to *[insert a list of details about activities – i.e., indulge in free hot chocolate, enjoy Christmas music by local music artists, capture memories at a selfie booth, meet others in the community, submit prayer requests and engage in conversations about the reason behind the season]*.

*"[Insert quote],"* shares *[first & last name]*, *[representative title]* of *[Church name]*, who is serving as an on-site coordinator for the event. *"[Additional/closing quote if desired]."*

*[Example idea for quote: "The holidays aren't always joyful for everyone, and we're honored to have an opportunity to offer a smile for and encouragement to others," shares XX, pastor of XX, who is serving as an on-site coordinator for the event. "We want people to know that regardless of where life has taken them, a local community of faith at Smithtown United Methodist Church is here to inspire and support them. We want them to know that Christ, whose birth is the reason for our Christmas celebration, loves and cares for them."]*

[Pew Research](#) found that the things people least liked about Christmas were related to commercialism and materialism. They would rather spend their time with family and friends. Eventbrite [revealed](#) that millennials place a higher value on experiences than they do possessions.

Given these findings, *[Church Name's]* event fits the bill for what people are looking for in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

The event at *[Church Name]* is hosted in tandem with hundreds of other local events coordinated by United Methodist Communications on behalf of the denomination. Local churches across the U.S. will host "Unwrap the True Meaning of Christmas" events in order to connect with individuals and families seeking relationship with a caring faith community and deeper meaning in life. Follow the events at #UnwrapChristmas.

###

*About [Church Name]*

*[Blurb about your church]*

CONTACT: (INCLUDE INFORMATION FOR SOMEONE PREPARED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS AND ARRANGE INTERVIEWS WITH A SPOKESPERSON)

*[Contact name, email, cell phone]*







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**Photo release form:** Use this form if you have organized registration for your event, and/or if the event is held in a private event space (i.e., you've invited the community to join you for a food-packaging event in your church gym).

**Photo release**

In consideration for my appearance in a community event supported by The United Methodist Church (UMC) entitled (event title)

\_\_\_\_\_ at (church name) \_\_\_\_\_,

the undersigned hereby assigns The UMC all rights to the use of my voice and/or likeness in the publication, distribution, transmission and/or display of any such picture, film, videotape, photographic reproduction (including associated soundtrack), illustration, advertisement, television program, videotape program, internet broadcast or digital file transfer (or any other medium now existing or developed in the future) of such image, voice or likeness, and of any prints or copies thereof or therefrom, in whole or in part, at the sole discretion of The UMC and/or its successors or assigns, in perpetuity, worldwide.

Please print:

LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	DATE OF BIRTH	AGE	GENDER
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MAILING ADDRESS	CITY	STATE	ZIP
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SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	DATE
--------------------------	------

**IN CASE OF A MINOR, SIGNATURE OF A PARENT OR GUARDIAN IS REQUIRED:**

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	DATE
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NAME OF PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN	SIGNATURE	DATE
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# UNWRAP the true meaning of CHRISTMAS

**General photo release signage:** Post this signage at all main entry points to your event so that people are aware that you will be capturing photos and videos.

## CROWD NOTICE / RELEASE

Please be aware that by entering this area, you consent to the use of your voice and/or likeness in the publication, distribution, transmission and/or display of any such picture, film, videotape, photographic reproduction (including associated soundtrack), illustration, advertisement, television program, videotape program, internet broadcast or digital file transfer (or any other medium now existing or developed in the future) of such images, voices or likenesses, and of any prints or copies thereof or therefrom, in whole or in part, at the sole discretion of The United Methodist Church and/or its successors or assigns, in perpetuity, worldwide.

**Please do not enter this area if you do not wish to be subject to the foregoing.**