

A Service “Advent”ure

Key Verse: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45, NRSV).

Purpose:

- a. To help people refocus on worshipping Jesus during Advent
- b. To offer multiple opportunities for congregation members to go out and serve in Jesus’ name through one organized event
- c. To issue the Advent Conspiracy congregational challenge: “Worship fully, spend less, give more, love all” (adventconspiracy.org)

Need-to-Know for Leaders

1. Based on the four key values of the Advent Conspiracy challenge, this Service “Advent”ure offers multiple ways to engage your congregation during Advent. The planning team should carefully pick and choose one or more activities that will challenge your members during a single daylong event or throughout all four weeks of Advent. Do what works best for your congregation to actively engage them in worshipping Jesus this season.

2. If you plan to offer service opportunities, start to line these up 4 to 8 weeks ahead of time. Try to get a variety of things that will engage a range of ages and abilities and offer help within your church, your community, and beyond. Be sure to use your denominational contacts if available, along with local nonprofit organizations, to see what needs and opportunities exist. Also be aware and plan accordingly if certain projects require additional materials or an advance sign-up to participate.

3. If issuing your congregation the official Advent Conspiracy challenge, be sure to visit their website (adventconspiracy.org) by mid-October to order any resource materials (promotional documents, small-group books, DVDs) you will need. Your church may choose to spread out the service opportunities throughout Advent and/or focus on a different goal of the Advent Conspiracy movement each week. (See explanation on page 70 and sample program ideas that follow.)

Note

This program is based on the four key values of a movement called Advent Conspiracy (advent.conspiracy.org). Started in 2006 by five pastors as a way to spur their congregations to rethink the Christmas season, the goal of Advent Conspiracy was to help people simply worship Jesus, said national director Ken Weigel. At the heart of that goal was the question: What if Christmas became a world-changing event again?

To help people process that potentially life-changing question, the pastors focused on four key values: *worship fully, spend less, give more, and love all*. How congregations live out those values is up to them, and many churches, as well as individuals, have shared their stories on the Advent Conspiracy website. In addition, the organizers have written a simple curriculum, also available through the website, so your planning team has access to many innovative ideas in

addition to the ones detailed here. However, Ken Weigel clarifies that the primary focus of Advent Conspiracy is worshipping Jesus, not creating more “stuff” to do during Advent.

The bottom line is that Advent Conspiracy hopes to help people to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2a, NIV) and “to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1, NIV). The planning team should be in prayer about any Advent programming that it puts in place during this season. Weigh the value of connecting people to Jesus through additional programs or services against the cost of adding to people’s schedules. Above all, ask for God’s guidance and do what works for your congregation, keeping in mind that Advent Conspiracy’s philosophy is that simple is better and that you don’t have to “do it all.”

Value 1/Week 1 Focus: Worship Fully

“Advent”ure 1: Bring a simple worship service of traditional carols and Christmas Scriptures out into the world—for example, nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, veterans homes, senior housing apartment complexes, malls, and shopping centers.

What You’ll Need

Volunteers: worship leader/musicians, worship team members (singers and mimes), kitchen crew (optional)

Hymnals or photocopies of song sheets with song/carol lyrics

Bible

Biblical costumes (fur tunic for John the Baptist; angel wings/halo; robes for Mary, Elizabeth, and Joseph; shepherd robes; shepherd crooks; magi robes/crowns/gifts)

Photocopies or PowerPoint of order of worship

Advent wreath, candles, and matches or lighter (optional)

Christmas cards with service times insert for guest worshippers

Advent Conspiracy printed resource materials if using and/or distributing

Refreshments (optional)

Directions

1. Recruit worship leader(s) and/or guitar player(s) (need a portable instrument).

2. Recruit worship team(s) who are willing to sing the carols loud and strong, as well as read the Scripture passages (youth will work well here if they are willing to sing and speak out). Another way to make the verses come alive is to have other volunteers wear traditional Christmas pageant costumes and pantomime actions while the verses are read. If choosing this option, the readers and the mimes should practice before leading the service. The planning team may also want

Contemporary in Context?

The planning team might also research other potential venues and create more contemporary services to fit the context, such as:

- a) A children- or youth-led service for a day-care center or children’s hospital. Church children can dress in costume and act out the Scripture. Bring extra animal costumes so that worshippers can also participate.
- b) A coffee house–style Christmas service at a local coffee shop or mall food court with an acoustic guitar player or percussionist providing up-tempo versions of classic carols and the Christmas Scripture interpreted like a poetry reading set to music.

to recruit additional volunteers to accompany the worship leaders and sit with the guests at the host site(s).

3. In advance, identify locations willing to host your portable worship service.

4. If needed, create a schedule of which team(s) are leading worship where.

5. Ahead of time, decide if your worship leaders will also bring a “gift,” maybe a Christmas card with an insert welcoming people to your church and listing service times and opportunities to connect in ministry and mission (see Love All gift idea in this chapter).

6. Make photocopies of the order of worship and any carol lyrics for the worship team(s) to bring to the service, along with directions or contact information for the host site(s). If using costumes/props for volunteers and/or an Advent wreath, pack up the costumes, props, wreath, candles, and matches or lighter.

7. Gather the worship team(s) at church before they go out to their host sites and pray with them that their offering of worship leadership will draw people closer to God and encourage them to think about his gift of love to this world.

8. Send them out!

9. If providing refreshments for worship teams back at church, plan supplies accordingly and recruit a kitchen team to handle setup and serving.

Sample Order of Worship

Welcome and Introduction of Church/Worship Team,
Invitation to Worship

Lighting of the First Advent Candle: the candle of hope

Opening Carol: “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” verse 1

Reading 1: Isaiah 9:2-7 (may want to use *The Message* or New Living Translation)

Responsive Carol: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” verses 1 and 3

Reading 2: Mark 1:1-8 (John the Baptist can appear in costume here)

Lighting of the Second Advent Candle: the candle of love

Reading 3: Luke 1:26-38 (Mary and Gabriel can appear in costume here)

Responsive Carol: “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” verses 1 and 5

Reading 4: Luke 1:39-56 (Mary and Elizabeth can appear in costume here)

Lighting of the Third Advent Candle: the candle of joy

Reading 5: Luke 2:1-7 (Mary and Joseph can appear in costume here)

Responsive Carol: “Away in a Manger,” verses 1 and 3

Reading 6: Luke 2:8-20 (shepherds and angels can appear in costume here)

Responsive Carol: “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing,” verses 1 and 3

Lighting of the Fourth Advent Candle: the candle of peace

Get Creative?

Consider using contemporary costumes for the biblical characters, such as grunge-look clothes for John the Baptist; sequined or lamé fabric for the angels; simple, everyday clothing for Mary, Elizabeth, and Joseph such as jeans and t-shirts; overalls and flannel shirts or other work clothes for the shepherds; power suits for the magi.

Carol of Preparation: “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” verse 1 and chorus

Reading 7: Matthew 2:1-12 (three magi appear in costume here)

Responsive Carol: “Silent Night,” verses 1–3

Prayers of Hope, Joy, Love, and Peace (worship leader to lead)

Sending Song: “Joy to the World,” verses 1 and 4

Value 2/Week 2 Focus: Spend Less

“Advent”ure 2: Create a personal Christmas budget and encourage people to reduce it overall by 10 percent and to take an additional 10 percent or more and donate it to Living Water International (Advent Conspiracy’s designated charity) or a designated church Advent mission project.

What You’ll Need

Photocopies of **Spend Less—Gift Refocusing Worksheet** (see reproducible sample in appendix)

Pencils

Directions

1. Ahead of time, create a worksheet (or use reproducible sample in appendix) with line items for various holiday expenses with a grand total, followed by lines for deductions.

2. Distribute the worksheet either when people register in advance or when they sign in on the day of the service event.

3. Optional: Set a donation goal for Advent Conspiracy’s Living Water International fund or another church-chosen mission project, and make a poster illustrating the starting point, goal, and progress made along the way. Display the poster in a high traffic area of your church.

4. Continue to remind people to “spend less” during this Christmas season with weekly e-mail/bulletin/mail slot reminders, as well as pastoral encouragement during weekend services. Encourage people to share examples of how they are spending less this year, and publicize those in your reminders.

Note: If reducing Christmas expenses by 10 percent in one year seems like an overwhelming challenge to give your congregation, instead ask them to give one less

purchased gift and replace the present with the gift of presence. For more ideas on relational giving, visit rethinkingchristmas.com. Or ask congregation members to give up one category on their gift-giving list and instead write a personal note to each person in that group of recipients.

“Advent”ure 3: Organize and run a new/nearly new/eco-friendly gift exchange for the congregation and larger community, encouraging people to make holiday gift selections from the merchandise.

What You’ll Need

Volunteers: donation sorters, processors, pricers, and cashiers; setup and cleanup crew; gift wrappers

Self-stick Christmas gift tags

Wrapping paper and/or holiday gift bags

Tip jar

Cash box with seed money for sale day

Advent Conspiracy printed resource materials, if using and/or distributing, or information about your designated church mission project to which the funds will go

Directions

1. Starting in August or September, seek donations of new or nearly new items from your congregation and/or community. Also consider collecting small- to medium-size boxes (shoe boxes, shirt boxes, etc.) and good condition gift bags for wrapping shoppers’ purchases.

2. Organize work days for volunteers to sort, wash, sanitize, wipe down, and iron donations as needed. Make a pile of items that are beyond “nearly new” and that can be given to an area resale shop or charity. Begin to sort items by category: household, toys, women’s, men’s, sporting goods, etc.

3. Try a “minimum suggested donation” pricing policy. Sort donations into price categories of \$1, \$2, \$5, etc., with those amounts being the minimum suggested donations for the items in that group.

4. Advertise the upcoming gift exchange in local papers and/or create flyers to post in area businesses or distribute to neighbors of the church, as well as to coworkers, friends, and family members. Advertise at four weeks out and again one week before (newspapers typically need a seven- to ten-day lead time for publicity). Use your local cable channel community

update forum if possible. Recruit artists from the congregation to make posters to hang up around church in advance and at the exchange explaining Advent Conspiracy and the spend-less challenge.

5. Your church may also choose to have a group of volunteers available to wrap purchases (may need to purchase new holiday wrapping paper but can use donated gift bags and boxes). Have self-stick gift tags available for the purchaser.

6. Keep a tip jar handy by the wrapping station with information about Advent Conspiracy, Living Water International, or the church-chosen mission project. All tips can go to the mission fund.

7. In addition, your church may choose to offer concessions or a sloppy joe/hot dog lunch for a separate fee/donation during this event, with proceeds going to the designated mission project. Be sure to recruit enough kitchen volunteers to staff this option if selected.

Value 3/Week 3 Focus: Give More

Starting at least four to eight weeks in advance, research and confirm multiple service opportunities to engage your congregation in a day of “giving more” (of themselves, not of stuff) during week three of Advent. For each opportunity, make sure to identify a site contact person; the site location, directions, and phone number; the project time frame; the number of volunteers needed; any supplies required; and whether advance sign up is needed. Visit adventconspiracy.org/story to see what other churches, organizations, and individuals have done, or use the following ideas.

“Advent”ure 4: Serve as Salvation Army bell ringers. This is a great intergenerational opportunity as volunteers of all ages are welcome. Those under sixteen need parental permission; those under fourteen need adult supervision. Teams of no more than two to three ringers are recommended so as not to intimidate donors. To find your local Salvation Army chapter, visit salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn_2.nsf and click on Ways to Give then on Volunteer. You can enter your zip code to see a list of area chapters. For a list of Frequently Asked Questions and the history of the Red Kettle Bell Ringers, visit thesalarmy.org/chris/bellringing.htm.

What You’ll Need

Volunteers: bell ringers, kitchen crew (optional)

Refreshments

Paper goods

Directions

1. Create a master schedule of ringers and locations.
2. Call or e-mail volunteers as needed before service day.
3. *Optional:* Provide refreshments for ringers before or after their shift back at church. Recruit a kitchen crew and purchase supplies as needed.

“Advent”ure 5: Provide yard cleanup and/or holiday decorating assistance to members of your congregation and/or community in need of help.

What You’ll Need

Volunteers: project leader for each home, workers for each home

Optional: evergreen wreath with card (see below) for each homeowner

Directions

1. Ahead of time, determine if there are older adults, single parents, or physically challenged adults in your congregation or community who need help cutting back plants, raking late-falling leaves, weather stripping doors, winterizing windows, etc. Your volunteer crews may also inquire if the homeowner would like help pulling out and/or setting up holiday decorations, outside and/or inside.
2. If your budget allows, provide the homeowners with simple evergreen wreaths for their front doors. Include a Christmas card that says: “Like this evergreen wreath, God’s love for you is ever new, ever fresh. We celebrate that truth each Christmas and remember that God loved us so much that he sent his only Son to us, and whoever believes in him will live forever in God’s heavenly house. We hope you will join us at God’s earthly house this Christmas season at (service location, dates, and times).”

Note: Some of your volunteers may simply give the gift of presence and visit with the homeowner(s) while the work is being done.

“Advent”ure 6: Provide child care for volunteers. (If not already cleared for service by your church, the planning team will need to do the necessary criminal

and child-abuse background checks before allowing volunteers to serve as child-care workers.) While the planning team is hopefully able to find intergenerational service opportunities, some situations may not be suitable for babies, toddlers, or even preschoolers. Consider recruiting a team of older adults (who love little kids) and high energy middle school students to staff a childcare room at the church for part or all of your work day. Providing this service does two things: it offers another way for older and younger congregation members to serve together, and it allows parents with small children to volunteer worry-free.

What You'll Need

Volunteers: adult and youth childcare workers
Registration form

Directions

1. Try to do advance sign-up for this service so that you know approximately how many childcare workers to provide and for how long. Length will depend on number and type of work projects offered.
2. Create a welcoming space with age-appropriate toys, snacks, music, DVDs, games, etc.
3. Supply a registration form for each child with parent cell phone numbers, emergency contact name and numbers, and any allergies, medications, and special needs noted.
4. Schedule your childcare workers in shifts so that they don't get overtired.

Do It Yourself!

Instead of using a predesigned, preprinted card, invite your participants to make the cards that will be distributed to the community. Supplies might include Christmas wrapping paper or old holiday cards from which to cut pictures to glue onto the new card. Include preprinted self-stick labels with Christmas worship service times and church contact information. Copies of the Christmas story from Luke may be taped or glued into the card.

Value 4/Week 4 Focus: Love All

“Advent”ure 7: Create a simple Christmas card and gift to distribute in the neighborhood, in the community, in local businesses, and to friends, coworkers, and family members that will share the message of God’s love and invite people to join you during Advent (and beyond) to celebrate God’s gift to the world.

What You'll Need

Volunteers: artist to design the card two months ahead of time, project leader for service work day, card assemblers, card distributors

Photocopies of a preprinted Christmas card tailored to your church (see description below and sample in this chapter)

Candy canes, 1 per card if using sample idea in this chapter

Optional: Supplies for creating hand-made Christmas cards (construction paper or cardstock, markers, crayons, colored pencils, holiday-theme stickers or foam shape stickers, Christmas wrapping paper or old Christmas cards, scissors, glue sticks, etc.)

Directions

1. Six to eight weeks in advance, recruit a volunteer to design a two-sided church Christmas postcard. One side will list all regular and special Christmas worship service times, as well as church contact information. The other side will share your message of God’s love. See the sample in the appendix, which can be adapted as needed for your congregation and community.

2. Host a work session during the last weekend of Advent where participants can attach the candy canes to the cards and create distribution routes for volunteers to go into the community and pass out the cards. Plan to have extras for volunteers to take into their own neighborhoods and workplaces.

Note: Your church may want to make these cards available earlier in Advent to pass out during your movable worship services or during your service projects or to have on hand for congregation members to distribute on their own. Plan accordingly if you want to use them before week four. This may include editing the text to list other Advent programming or special services.