



Lewis Center
for Church Leadership

Leading Ideas

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Palms in the Park on Palm Sunday **By Laura Heikes**

During the Easter Season, the First United Methodist Church in New Braunfels, Texas, launched an outreach event in the heart of our city. Our goal was to take our worship service to the people instead of asking them to come to us. With that in mind, we rented space in Landa Park, a natural area at the heart of our city with natural springs, a wading pool, paddle boats, a mini-train, playgrounds, and picnic areas. Many residents come there to relax and renew. The church rented a space in the park called “the Dance Slab” along with two picnic pavilions for fellowship and refreshments after the worship service.

Instead of our normal Easter mailer, we targeted neighborhoods where there were lots of new folks with information about Palms in the Park. Our hope was to get them to visit twice – first on Palm Sunday and, second, when we invited them back for Easter. The mailers described the service and told them what to bring (chairs and a picnic lunch) and mentioned communion would also be available. As an additional incentive, we offered free rides on the mini-train in the park.

On the day of the event, our Evangelism Team filled helium balloons printed with a smiley face, our church’s name, and the message “God loves you!” and took them around the entire park to children and adults picnicking there. We put out signs, marked the site with banners and balloons, and began playing music to draw people in. We had people in the 90 chairs we had brought and in camping chairs and on blankets throughout the dance slab and spilling over onto the grass and under trees.

This worship service was a huge success! We normally have 220 for worship, but on this Sunday we had 475 – far more than we ever expected. Many folks from our congregation invited not just one friend, but several. Others came because of the mailers, and still others came over after receiving a balloon or hearing the music. The next Sunday, Easter, also saw an increase as people returned. We had 100 more in worship than last year.

To get a glimpse of the service, watch this video:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3Bunxv4L2c&feature=channel_page

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