# Plan to Strengthen Invitation This Easter

In Matthew’s version of the story, the glowing messenger at the tomb says to the two Marys on Easter morning, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him’” (Matthew 28:5–7). Easter is a season of invitation, to come and see the wild mystery of the Jesus story, to tell others about the amazing liberating power of Christ at work in us.

Yet, many of us, whether we are ministry staff, volunteers, or congregants, struggle to know how to offer a strong invitation to others that is also respectful. For decades, bad examples of welcome have been offered to us in mainstream media, and we have grown anxious about being perceived as inauthentic, or, at worst, predatory. That is why we created this resource to give you some helpful tips and ideas on how to craft a bold and authentic invitation to join in your community’s life of faith in the time leading up to the Easter season.

Does your community of faith want to grow in your capacity to share faith and build community with your neighbours? Contact your Growth Animator at growth@united-church.ca. These colleagues are excited to share resources and provide coaching to help your congregation strengthen its invitation.

## The Key to a Great Invitation

A great invitation, especially when centered in a community of faith, is not *one moment* but rather a *series of opportunities*. To prepare your community members to take hold of these various opportunities, it is important as leadership to communicate with them about intentionality. We know the most powerful invitation we can offer is an **intentional and personal invitation**. Although promoting our services and activities on social media, the radio or local newspaper is also helpful, this is a passive form of invitation. We know that people are most likely to attend church when invited by a friend or neighbour.

But this often doesn’t feel comfortable and so doesn’t tend to be the practice within many of our United Church communities of faith. Intentional planning can help us try something new on for size. Here are some tips to engage your congregation in an invitation plan this Easter.

## First Week of Lent

### Communicate clearly to your congregants your invitation plans.

Share with your folks your community's plan to prepare during Lent for an intentional Easter invitation. Let your folks know who you hope they will invite and to what specific activities. Being clear will help them identify people in their lives who they could extend an invitation to. Even better, share what you hope those invitees will experience.

“This year we really want to reach out to families with young children and invite them to our upcoming Messy Church Easter event. We hope that the kids and their caregivers will have fun, but also experience loving community.”

### Practice sharing your stories.

During Lent, create a moment in the service for congregants to practice sharing how Christ has impacted their lives, perhaps connected to the Lenten theme for the year. The more we practice talking about our faith with other church regulars, the easier it is in the moment with a friend or neighbour.

“First Sunday in Lent: In our reading from Romans 10:8b–13, Paul tells us that everyone who calls on God’s name will be rescued. Share an example from your life where you felt like God offered you rescue.”

## Second Week of Lent

### Use the offering to share how inviting others can be a faithful response to God.

Use the offertory moment in your service to make a connection between God at work in our lives and the ways we can respond as bold disciples.

“Now is the time that we ask you to consider how you might be called by the Spirit to offer yourself in generosity at [church name] and in the [city/town/village] that we’re called to serve. Here at [church name] that usually includes giving financially to sow generosity in our hearts and help fulfill our shared mission, sharing your spiritual gifts in a way that brings you life and serves as a blessing to others, and inviting others who aren’t yet part of this community so that we might be transformed together by the story of Jesus and the love and grace of God.”

## Third Week of Lent

### Create an engaging invitation card.

Get creative, or use a template (available on [Canva](https://www.canva.com/) or [Etsy](https://www.etsy.com/ca/search?q=easter+invitation+template&ref=search_bar&dd_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.etsy.com%2Fca%3Futm_source%3Dgoogle%26utm_medium%3Dcpc%26utm_term%3Detsy_e%26utm_campaign%3DSearch_CA_Brand_GGL_ENG_General-Brand_Core_All_Exact%26utm_ag%3DA1%26utm_custom1%3D_k_Cj0KCQiA_NC9BhCkARIsABSnSTY6XXvFEXBUmoICzfv-ZDEnIlvP1LBcaKE0bSTpzKgcsbKEFiEgQV0aAv9XEALw_wcB_k_%26utm_content%3Dgo_1463443864_59403767200_542583523663_aud-2079782229334%3Akwd-1818581752_c_%26utm_custom2%3D1463443864%26gad_source%3D1%26gclid%3DCj0KCQiA_NC9BhCkARIsABSnSTY6XXvFEXBUmoICzfv-ZDEnIlvP1LBcaKE0bSTpzKgcsbKEFiEgQV0aAv9XEALw_wcB)), to create a physical or digital invitation to your event or activity. An invitation card offers congregants something tangible to give out when extending an invite. Postcard-sized invitations can be stuck up on fridges with all the info for an upcoming event, so you’re not worried about details getting missed. Digital ones can be texted to friends with a personal note and link to your website. Be sure to emphasize that these are meant to be passed out personally! It is the personal invitation that will make the biggest impact!

## Fourth Week of Lent

### Share an invitation sermon.

During Lent, consider sharing a sermon focused on a culture of invitation, emphasizing that invitation is not a single opportunity but an orientation we have as God’s people. On the fourth Sunday in Lent, the 2 Corinthians 5:16–21 reading invites us to think of ourselves as ambassadors for Christ. The Gospel reading of the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:1–3, 11b–32) invites us to imagine how we can offer unexpected and abundant welcome.

## Fifth Week of Lent

### Encourage folks to pray for those they plan to invite.

Encourage church regulars to pray for those they are planning to invite. When we pray for others, we are both calling on God to be deeply present in their lives as well as deepening our care for that person. We can also ask the Holy Spirit to be with us as we dare to extend that invitation.

“God, I thank you for [name]. I know that you love [name] and I ask that you would help [them] to feel that love deeply. God, as I prepare to invite [name] to [event or activity]. I also ask that you give me the confidence and humility I need to share my faith, and the wisdom to know when it is appropriate to share.”

### Model invitation language with a roleplay.

Empower your community members with invitation language by creating a short skit to share during worship to model what invitation can look like. You can also role model how to receive a “yes” *and* a “no” graciously.

We’ve provided an example video here from Advent 2024 you can share, which is available on The United Church of Canada’s YouTube channel.

[Season of Invitation Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlhsGiDELHk)

## More Tips for a Great Invitation

### Pair the uncomfortable with the familiar.

One way to get over the awkwardness of inviting someone to church is to focus on what might be familiar to them. Easter, and Christmas, can be helpful because folks are more familiar with these moments in the church calendar.

“Would you and the kids like to join us for the Easter brunch and worship service at our church? There is going to be an egg hunt, and we’re even having a special all-ages choir sing during worship.”

“I remember you telling me how much you loved going to church with your grandmother when you were little. Well, Easter is coming up and I wanted to invite you to join me, we could even get dressed up in our ‘Sunday Best’ and make an occasion of it.”

### Pair the invitation to church with an invitation to deeper relationship.

When you invite someone to church, consider inviting them to lunch afterward or to carpool and grab coffee together beforehand.

“I know your son isn’t always able to drive you, why don't you join Bob and I at church for Easter and we can come pick you up? I know a lot of folks go out to the diner together afterwards, and we’d be delighted to treat you.”

### Consider what’s next.

As regular churchgoers we sometimes forget the guts it takes to walk into a church for the first time, or the first time in a long time. However, those barriers don’t all disappear after that initial moment of welcome. We need to be intentional about following up with newcomers, focusing on building relationships with these potential community members. **Help your community think through next steps** in your community’s life together. Sometimes the next step happens naturally. If someone attends an event during Holy Week, for example, the person who invited them might then ask them to come to the Easter Sunrise Service.

However, it is also helpful to have examples of next steps that you can share with your regulars. If someone came to your church and asked outright, “What does it mean for me to follow in the way of Jesus in this church?” or “How do I become part of your community?”, how would you respond? People don’t often ask the question that directly, but it is likely something a newcomer is curious about.

Some next steps could include being introduced to a leader, being invited to a newcomers’ lunch, or an introductory discipleship program designed for people who are new to the church. Whatever that next step is, it should be clear, specific, and well-known by your church regulars, and it should welcome the new person into a relationship with more than just the person who initially invited them.