



# church calendar

the MINISTRY PAPERS

## “commitment” isn’t the only issue

Ministers often find themselves calling for more “commitment”. They can feel disappointed by what they perceive to be a lack of commitment from the church family. But is commitment the only issue? Often communication is the far bigger issue that needs to be addressed.

Take the church camp. The planning was good. The program was good. The speaker was good. The venue was good. Everything about it was good. Except that so few people showed up! “Where’s the commitment?”.

But there was one thing about the church camp that wasn’t so good. The communication. In fact the communication was woeful. And it only takes a moment’s reflection on how poor the communication was to see that commitment wasn’t the only issue.

Firstly, most people only found out that the church camp was on a few weeks before it happened. Many already had other things planned. And while it’s fine to say that ‘commitment’ might cause them to alter the plans, that’s often easier said than done. Perhaps *our* commitment should be to make it easier for them to plan ahead than to have to attempt reshuffles.

Secondly, it turned out that the clash for many people in the church family was a significant community event that they were involved in. Taking the church’s presence away from that event was actually detrimental to its witness in the community. They in fact had a healthy ‘commitment’!

Better communication not only would have helped schedule for maximum camp attendance but might have also promoted involvement in the community event. That’s just one way that a church calendar can be helpful...

This ministry paper acts as a companion to the introductory papers ‘the ministry training church’ and ‘meeting one to one’. If pastor-teachers are going to get serious about training, it means planning ahead. As discussed in the ‘getting ministry done’ paper, training isn’t one of the urgent things screaming to be done today. A church calendar can be an essential tool in prioritizing training. That’s what this paper is about.



read **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**

1. What is Paul’s fixed goal in all his ministry?

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2. How is he flexible in achieving this goal?

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3. Describe the lives of the people you minister among.

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4. To what extent is busyness a feature of their lives?

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5. In what ways might such busyness need to be challenged?

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6. In what ways might this busyness need to be accepted and adapted to in your ministry?

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# training = communication

The purpose of the MINISTRY PAPERS is to promote training in the local church. The 'getting ministry done' paper emphasized that **training = time**: training is not a priority in your ministry until it's a priority in your diary. The principle behind this 'church calendar' paper is that **training = communication**. For training to happen, everyone needs to be on the same page.



## the benefits

The introduction on page 1 highlighted the most obvious benefit of developing a church calendar: people will actually know when things are on! Clashes can be avoided, people can plan ahead, etc. But that's really only the beginning of the benefits. Here are a few others to think through:

### priorities

the process of putting the calendar together will force you (and the whole church leadership) to ask what the priorities are for the coming year. Is the focus a strengthening one for the church perhaps? Or an outreach focus? You probably want both those things and more. But having a sense of the greatest immediate priority can be helpful. You might even decide on a theme that holds the year together (e.g. 'improve your serve' for a year focused on training and equipping).

### planning

with a sense of the big picture need/priority/theme for the coming year you are in a position to plan various aspects of the year accordingly. Most importantly, you'll be able to develop a preaching program for the year that best serves that overall goal.

### focus

churches often simply have too much on. Ministry teams get stretched. People can easily feel that they can't possibly get to everything, so it's easier to just go to nothing. Developing a calendar will help you to plan a few well chosen events that serve the overall focus for the year (see sidebar).

### co-ordination

developing the calendar will require participation from all ministries in the church. Plotting all the key dates from each ministry will ensure clashes are avoided. Further, working together towards the theme for the year can bring unity and purpose to all the ministries of the church.

### shape

the process of developing a calendar will help you get a sense of shape to the year. A year of mission for example may start with a focus on prayer, equipping and motivation for mission in terms 1 & 2, some concentrated mission activity in term 3, and a newcomers course in term 4. Getting this big picture of the flow of the year can greatly help with scheduling

### time

while there is time required in the development of the calendar, it will pay you back many times over in the coming year. Planning on the run from week to week takes a lot more time than an intensive one-off effort, and can never be as effective. As you enjoy the clarity of knowing what is happening week to week, significant time becomes available for training.

### communication

the clear communication made possible by the calendar promotes training across all ministries. A church that is scrambling along from week to week in survival mode will find it hard to ever prioritise training. Planning is very much the fore-runner to training. The calendar gives you that platform.

## an eventful year?

It's easy to assume, when thinking about putting together a church calendar, that we're talking primarily about events. But there's a big difference between an eventful year and a year that's just full of events!

Don't make 'events' the focus of your planning. We too quickly assume that 'events' are the way to achieve our goals. For example, a year of outreach focus might start with an intensive evangelism training course, right? Maybe not. It might end up making everyone so busy that they neglect relationships with the unbelieving friends you're training them to reach!

Make the focus of your planning your week by week core life as a church: Sunday gatherings and small groups. So in the example above, think through how evangelism training could be built into those core activities. A term of preaching and small group bible studies on evangelism training may have a greater impact than an additional course attended by a few. Remembering the equipping dimension of our preaching ministry of the Word (Eph 4:12) may open up new thoughts about what can be achieved through it.

The biggest 'events' on the calendar are the ones that happen week in week out. Think about the advantages of this approach. Not only will it help ensure that our lives don't become too busy and removed from the community we live in, it will also maximize the number of people who receive the training.

That's not to say there'll be no 'extra' events on the church calendar. But it will mean there'll be fewer well chosen events that are there for a reason. In developing a church calendar, remember that we want people to be at church and small group each week, and involved in serving in some sort of ministry, but not so busy with church that they can't be involved in the community.



# measure twice cut once

“Measure twice and cut once”. It applies not just to carpentry but to many aspects of ministry. A church calendar where things often end up cancelled or moved is worse than not having one at all. People need to be confident in it. Of course, some circumstances might require an adjustment. But careful planning will make that the exception not the rule.

## planning to plan

Planning to plan was discussed in the ‘getting ministry done’ paper and it’s very much worth repeating here. The old saying that if you’re ever going to plan, you need to plan to plan. It’s true. You need to set aside, for example, 15 minutes a day, an hour a week, a day a quarter, a week a year... to PLAN.

Everything you do every other minute, hour, day, week etc will be so much more effective if you plan to plan and stick to the plan. Planning and training are never the urgent things screaming at us from day to day. Unless we make them an appointment in our diary they simply won’t happen.

One of the first things we should schedule in our own diaries for the coming year is planning time. And if we don’t plan for a significant block of time to produce a church calendar, it will either not happen, or be poorly thought through and so a hindrance rather than a help to effective ministry of the gospel.

The goal of a church calendar, isn’t just producing a publication but casting a vision. So *quality* time needs to be set aside for it (i.e. don’t attempt to produce it during a peak time of activity). And because the goal is a comprehensive plan that implements that vision, there will be a significant *quantity* of time needed too. From the preaching program through to implications for all ministries, there is not only a lot of planning to do but a lot of communication needed.

Think in terms of at least one week devoted to the detail of the planning. It may need to happen in October or certainly by November in order to get a calendar in the hands (and on the walls) of the church family by December. The church leadership need to have decided upon an overall theme/priority for the year before that planning week, and there’ll need to be time for feedback and checking from all ministries after it. The rest of this page offers a step by step process for producing the calendar.

## the process

Below is a step-by step guide for putting a church calendar together (a sample month is shown on page 4). If you want this to be the default wall calendar for everyone in your church family, it’s a good idea to distribute it before Christmas. A 13 month calendar distributed at the end of November is probably the best option. That means the planning work should start in October. In reality, if you don’t do it then, the busyness of the end of the year and Christmas will mean it doesn’t happen at all. And if you’re someone who likes to use January for planning, consider the great advantages of already having the shape of the year and a preaching program in place. You’ll be able to get up and running in the new year, straight into bible study writing etc.

1. Leadership assess, with input from all ministries, the greatest need/priority for the coming year and develop a theme and shape (as discussed on page 2).
2. Develop a preaching program for the year that will serve that aim: what biblical books will you cover as the heart of the program? will any topical talks be needed? Will any Sundays have a special stand out function?
3. Communicate the information from the above two points to all ministries of the church and gather further input in terms of their key plans/dates/events.
4. Grab a template calendar for the coming year and plot:
  - key dates from all the ministries (point 3). Depending on the size of the church you will have to determine what level of detail goes on the general calendar that everyone gets—and what detail can be left off and communicated through other channels)
  - key ‘annual’ corporate dates that affect everyone: e.g. Christmas & Easter, AGM, etc
  - key ‘one-off’ corporate dates (in accordance with theme)
  - key meetings such as leadership team and management committee—while they don’t directly affect everyone, it’s good for everyone to know when they’re on.
  - key community dates that you want to avoid clashing with (or be involved in)
5. Step 4 will usually highlight either direct clashes or over-busy ‘clusters’ in the schedule. Another round of communication with ministries will then be needed to resolve clashes and gain a more even spread of activity.
6. After step 5 you should now be able to produce a draft. Distribute the draft and even consider displaying it on a Sunday. Many eyes can be helpful in spotting potential planning/timing issues.
7. The final step before distribution is formatting. A key issue there is distinguishing key events from more routine ones (e.g. with a picture).



ideas for discussion

## term by term

We need to plan with the many families involved (or that we want involved) in our church in mind. Life for families has a ‘term rhythm’ and it’s helpful if the shape of the church year is in harmony with that rhythm. Consider having a term by term ‘shape’ to the year. Preaching series could follow a term pattern. And with the calendar already outlining the broad shape, you can then set aside some time late each term to plan for the coming term (bible studies, music program, roster, newsletter, etc).

