

Get the word out: Promoting summer events



By Renee McNeill

Summer is one of the most natural seasons for a church to open its doors - and its parking lot - to the surrounding community. Block parties, Vacation Bible School, service days, and neighborhood picnics are more than fun events. They are outreach opportunities, and how well you promote them determines how many people actually walk through the gate.

The challenge most churches face is not a lack of good events. It is a promotion strategy that starts too late, relies on a single channel, or treats every event the same regardless of its audience. This article walks through a practical, channel-by-channel approach to summer event promotion that works whether your communications team is one person or ten.

Start earlier than feels necessary

The most common promotion mistake churches make is starting too close to the event date. By the time most people see a single post or email, the event is already a week away - and their calendar is full. A strong promotion timeline begins three to four weeks out for major events like VBS or a community block party, and at least two weeks out for smaller gatherings like a service day or congregational picnic.

Think of your promotion in three phases. The first phase announces the event and plants the seed. The second builds anticipation with behind-the-scenes content, registration reminders, and personal invitations. The third is the final push - the week-of reminders that tip undecided people over the edge. Each phase serves a different purpose, and skipping any one of them leaves people behind.

Facebook Events: Your most underused tool

Facebook Events remain one of the most effective free tools available for church event promotion, especially for reaching people outside your congregation. When someone marks an event as "Interested" or "Going," that action is visible to their friends - giving your event organic reach that a standard post cannot match.

To get the most out of a Facebook Event:

- Create the event page as soon as the date is confirmed. The earlier it exists, the more time people have to discover and share it.

- Write a description that speaks to community members, not just current members. Avoid insider language. Tell a newcomer exactly what to expect, what to bring, and why they would enjoy it.

- Use the event's photo or cover image wisely. A real photo from a previous year's event - people laughing, kids playing, tables full of food - outperforms a designed graphic almost every time.

- Post updates directly inside the event page leading up to the event. Event page followers receive notifications for these updates, keeping excitement building in a dedicated space.

- Ask your leadership team and engaged members to share the event to their personal profiles. One personal share from a trusted community voice does more than five posts from the church page.

- For VBS specifically, pin a direct registration link in the event description and post a reminder about it every few days as the deadline approaches.

Instagram Stories: Built for the build-up

Instagram Stories are perfectly suited for the kind of ongoing, casual promotion that keeps an event in front of people without feeling repetitive. Because Stories disappear after 24 hours, you can post event content more frequently than you would in your main feed without it feeling like you are hammering the same message.

Effective Story content in the weeks leading up to a summer event:

- Countdown stickers. Instagram's built-in countdown feature creates a small but effective sense of anticipation and allows followers to set a reminder directly from your Story.

- Behind-the-scenes preparation clips. A short video of volunteers setting up tables, decorating for VBS, or packing donation bags for a service day builds excitement and communicates that real people are working hard to make something special happen.

- Poll and question stickers. "Are you coming to the block party?" or "What are you most looking forward to at VBS this year?" invite participation and help you gauge interest ahead of time.

- A link sticker to your registration page or event details. Make it as easy as possible for someone to go from seeing your Story to signing up or adding the event to their calendar.

- Day-of Stories showing setup, arrival, and live moments from the event. These serve double duty - they draw in people who are still deciding whether to come, and they create content you can repurpose into a post-event recap Reel.

Save your best event-day Stories to a Highlight on your profile. A "Block Party 2026" or "VBS 2026" Highlight becomes a permanent piece of social proof that new visitors and prospective members can browse long after the event is over.

Email

Social media gets people excited. Email gets them to show up. Your congregation's email list is one of your most direct lines of communication, and it is especially valuable for events that require registration, preparation, or a commitment of time.

A basic email sequence for a major summer event like VBS or a block party:

- Three to four weeks out - the announcement email. Keep it short and enthusiastic. Include the date, a brief description of what to expect, and one clear call to action - usually a registration link or a "save the date" prompt.

- One to two weeks out - the details email. This is where you share logistics: what to bring, where to park, the schedule for the day, and any volunteer needs still unfilled. This email answers the practical questions that turn interest into attendance.

- Two to three days out - the reminder email. Short, warm, and direct. "We cannot wait to see you Saturday" with a single-sentence logistics recap and a link to directions or the event page is all you need.

- After the event - the follow-up email. Thank attendees, share a photo or two, and give people a next step - whether that is registering for next year's VBS, signing up to volunteer, or simply visiting on Sunday. This email is especially important for reaching community members who attended but are not yet regular participants.

Write subject lines that sound like a person, not a newsletter. "We saved you a seat" will outperform "Annual Block Party Announcement" every time. Aim for subject lines that create curiosity or a sense of personal invitation.

Event-specific tips

Different events call for slightly different promotion approaches. Here are a few practical adjustments based on event type.

Vacation Bible School

VBS promotion needs to reach parents, not just church members. Use Facebook Events and boosted posts to extend your reach into the surrounding neighborhood. Make registration easy - a single link that works on a phone is essential. Feature real kids from previous years (with parental permission) in your promotional content. Parents trust what they can see.

Block parties and community picnics

These events live or die by neighborhood word of mouth. Pair your digital promotion with physical visibility - yard signs, door hangers, or a banner on your building a few weeks before the event. On

social media, use specific location language in your posts and captions so that people in your area find you through local searches and shares.

Community service days

For service events, lead with the mission in your promotion - not the logistics. "We are spending Saturday morning cleaning up Riverside Park" is more compelling than "Volunteer Service Day, 8 a.m." Let people know specifically what their time will accomplish and who will benefit. This kind of promotion also invites participation from community members who may not be regular churchgoers but care deeply about the neighborhood.

Do not forget the bulletin and the pulpit

Digital promotion reaches people between Sundays. But the most motivated volunteers, participants, and word-of-mouth ambassadors for your summer events are sitting in your pews right now. A genuine, enthusiastic mention from the pastor or an emcee during announcements - paired with a clear next step - remains one of the most effective event promotion tools available. Make sure your digital and in-person communications are working together, not in separate silos.

Promotion is an act of welcome

Every piece of event promotion your church puts out is an invitation. It says: there is something good happening here, and you are welcome to be part of it. When that message is clear, warm, and consistent across every channel, more people say yes - and some of those people will walk through your doors for the very first time.