



December 2016

Dear North East District Family,

I'm a Christmas guy. This is my absolute most favorite time of year. I love the magical quality of once again discovering that God loves us so much that, as Eugene Peterson wrote, he "moved into the neighborhood" to be with us. The music, the worship, the gatherings all proclaim the glorious idea of the Incarnation that God came to walk among us, live with us, and die for us. I'm still in awe over that fact.

As we begin this Advent and Christmas season, here are some ideas that you might want to consider within your own faith communities:

1. People are more likely this time of year than just about any other time to be open to an invitation to worship. I would encourage your leadership and worship design teams to be thinking about how you can be intentional with invitations. Could you create post cards or business cards for your church folks to use in passing out to neighbors, friends, family, and co-workers? Are you using social media to extend invitations? Are you lifting up the value of hospitality and why it's essential in our Christian witness so your members are empowered and equipped to extend that same hospitality?
2. This can also be a difficult time of year for people. It's hard for people who are grieving a lost loved one. It's challenging for people who face addiction issues. It's rough for people whose families have a hard time being together in healthy ways. I would encourage you to consider having a "Blue Christmas" service sometime near the winter solstice – the longest night of the year. It's a great way for the church to be in ministry with hurting people and opens yet another doorway into your faith community. If you're not familiar with what one looks like, I have a service that I'd be willing to share with you that I used at the church I served before coming on the district.
3. People love Christmas music. They only get to hear it this one time of year. I would encourage your worship design team to consider changing your order of service so there can be more music in it. Let the choir or band play an extra piece each Sunday. Shorten your sermons so one more Christmas carol can be sung. You'll find people will derive great meaning from that and guests will appreciate it, too.
4. Make sure on Christmas Eve that you have something to invite people to attend. Perhaps you want to introduce your new sermon series that you're starting in January – let people know what it's all about and make sure it's relevant and practical. Maybe you're having a special outreach or missions event that guests could participate in, share about it. Have an insert or card in the bulletin they can take home with them so they can mark their calendars and register for it. It should be something relatively soon so you can help them to plug-in to your faith community.
5. Don't underestimate the power of having worship on Christmas Day! People will come. Make it a relaxed service. Tell people to come casual. Sing extra Christmas music. I always invited kids to come in their pajamas and to bring their favorite toy Santa brought them so we could have a

blessing of the toys during the children's moment. Find a way to make it warm, casual, and inviting, and people will join you.

I know how busy this time of year is. Please know I'm praying for you. Thank you for serving Jesus and helping everyone to, once again, encounter the amazing message of His birth! God bless you, and Merry Christmas!

All God's love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jay Therrell".

Jay Therrell, Superintendent