



Sunday Experience Planning Guide

Every parish should draft a plan to create the best Sunday Experience possible at their parish. This plan lays out the deliberate way in which a parish hopes to welcome, engage, serve, and invite parishioners into the community life of the church.

Guide to creating a Sunday Experience Plan:

1. Create a well-rounded planning team including staff and parishioners who represent many facets of parish life. The team's role is to complete the assessment process and draft a **Sunday Experience Plan**, then work with the parish to implement the plan in a phased-approach. A recommended number of participants for a team is **eight to ten people**.
2. Once the team has been assembled, conduct an assessment of your current Sunday experience to determine your areas of opportunity (see "Sunday Experience Assessment" template). When conducting the assessment, allow each person on the team to complete their own assessment, then share each assessment and draw conclusions to determine top priorities.
3. As part of each person's assessment, take time to walk the parish property and buildings either as a group or individually.
 - **Go into each entrance** - How accessible is it? What is the experience as you walk through the door and into the church? What do you notice?
 - **Walk the parking lot** – What is the experience of someone pulling into the parish, parking their car, and walking to the church building? At night, is there proper lighting?
 - **As you walk into the church through the main entrance**, what feeling do you have in the narthex? Is there a sense of warmth? Is information easily accessible? Are restrooms noticeable and easy to find?
 - **Walk the hallways of faith formation spaces** and enter the classrooms. Are they bright and cheerful? Are they inviting and do they reflect the beauty of the Catholic faith and incite excitement for learning?
 - **Enter the worship space**. Does it evoke a sense of mystery and reverence? Is the space comfortable? Is the temperature too cold or too warm? Does the sound system enhance participation in Mass or detract from it?Be sure to record your observations for each space and encourage people to share those as part of their assessment.
4. Your assessment should also include the in-person experience parishioners have throughout the 90-minutes.
 - **Welcome and greeting** – Do parishioners feel welcomed, acknowledged, and "known" while they are at the parish? Do they feel "at-home" and comfortable or isolated and awkward?



- **Information and communications** – Do parishioners know where to find information and are you communicating with them in a hospitable manner (ex: “Please turn off all cell phones.” Vs “We invite you to silence your cell phones in preparation for Mass”) or just nicely telling them the rules?
 - **Music** – Does your music enhance the reverence and mystery of the Mass? Does it reflect the liturgical seasons and correspond with the Gospel readings for the week? Do you provide music sheets, hymnals, or use screens...or all of the these depending on the Mass time?
 - **Homilies and spiritual formation** – Are homilies easy to understand, timely, applicable to daily life, and connected to the Gospel? Are you offering parishioners additional nuggets of faith formation and engagement beyond the homily?
 - **Family** – Does the parish accommodate the needs of young families by providing worship aids for children, nurse space for babies and toddlers, and/or a cry room where parents can still participate in the Mass while tending to children?
 - **Fellowship** – Does your Sunday Experience include opportunities for fellowship among parishioners, activities where friendships and relationships can be fostered, and experiences for people to encounter clergy and get to know them?
5. Once assessments are completed and team members have shared their conclusions, begin to draft your Sunday Experience Plan (see “Sunday Experience Plan Template”). Remember, this is not a “facilities plan” but a plan for how your parish will make the most of those critical 90-minutes parishioners spend at your campus each week. Consider the following questions:
- How do you plan to deliberately engaging parishioners from the time they pull into the parking lot until they leave 90 minutes later?
 - How do you plan to invite them back for something meaningful and of value to them?
 - How are you communicating with parishioners beyond a bulletin handed out at the door?
 - How will you create an atmosphere of welcome and hospitality necessary for parishioners to view the parish as their spiritual home?
 - How will you create gathering spaces which encourage people to be together, have conversations, and find fellowship with one another? If you currently have these spaces, how they can be enhanced to provide warmth and welcome?
 - How do your facilities enhance the overall Sunday Experience?
6. Your plan should address the following categories:
- Facilities**
- Exterior spaces (parking lot, outdoor gathering spaces, roadside signage, etc.)
 - Narthex and other main entrance spaces
 - Worship space
 - Family space (cry room, nursery)
 - Faith Formation spaces (hallways, classrooms, indoor gathering spaces, etc.)
 - Parish offices (spaces where people are greeted and encounter parish staff)
 - Indoor gathering spaces (parish hall, gymnasium, etc.)



- Other – identify other spaces/experiences specific to your parish

Communications

- Communications and information delivery before and after Mass, outside of the worship space (information desk, greeters, monitor with news and event highlights, etc.)
- Communications and information delivery just before and after Mass, inside the worship space (pulpit announcements, use of screens, literature in the pews, etc.)
- Communications throughout the week to keep in touch with parishioners, invite them to Mass, encourage them to attend events outside of Mass, etc.

Personal Experience

- Welcome and hospitality
- Fellowship and relationships
- Music and liturgical engagement
- Homilies and spiritual formation
- Family needs
- Clergy accessibility

7. As with any plan, keep the following principles in mind:

- Your plan should be simple, straight forward, and easy for anyone in the parish to understand.
- Keep ideas and goals within current resources. Do not plan for something that is not practical or outside of the financial, personnel, or facility means of the parish.
- Implementation should always be phased and should not happen all at once. Begin with the “low hanging fruit” that can be implemented easily and quickly and leave more complicated or more sensitive changes to be implemented over time.
- Consider how you will communicate this plan to the parish community. Tactics should include those that will build excitement, create buy-in, and keep parishioners informed of changes and new initiatives.
- Include ways for parishioners to volunteer to help implement the plan in meaningful ways that will encourage involvement and build relationships.