

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY INVITE SOMEONE TO PILGRIMAGE

A Step-by-Step Guide to Comfortably and
Confidently Ask People to Attend

How to Effectively Invite People to Pilgrimage

Introduction

Are there people who you just KNOW could benefit from going to their own Pilgrimage Weekend? Do you feel uncertain about how to invite them effectively? Or, have you invited someone repeatedly unsuccessfully?

If so, then you are in for a treat with this guide. The information is adapted and expanded from a webinar presentation by Dwight Nichols, head of recruitment for the North Texas Presbyterian Pilgrimage community. What you are about to learn will likely turn your assumptions about recruiting new pilgrims upside down. It did mine.

Before Dwight's presentation I thought all I had to do was tell someone, "Hey, you should go on a pilgrimage weekend. You'll love it" and then hand them a brochure with all the details or direct them to the website and they would go.

Boy was I ever wrong. I couldn't understand why all of my joy, enthusiasm, and encouragement didn't translate into someone saying yes. My lack of results was frustrating and discouraging.

Through what you are about to learn I came to see how completely backwards and ineffective that approach was. In fact, the next day I put to work the tried and true strategies Dwight shared and got an immediate yes from someone. Finally having someone eager to attend felt fantastic. You can do this too.

This guide is designed to be a workbook offering you step-by-step instructions to immediately implement the principles of effectively inviting someone. Simple exercises will equip you to comfortably and confidently be the critical missing link between a potential pilgrim and attending a renewal weekend. Plus, an easy-to-follow eight step checklist will help you quickly implement what you learn.

So, are you ready to successfully invite those people you thought of? Then keep reading.

Blessings,

John Arnold

Zionsville Great Banquet #30, The Table of Paul * clap *

PS: Watching the original presentation is not necessary. However, you may find it beneficial. You can watch that video on the youtube channel of Arkansas Presbyterian Pilgrimage at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeAU5K6wy8Y>

Why Most Communities Fail at Recruitment

The Problem – “Field of Dreams” Recruitment

God calls people through us. That’s why “invite” is the operative word in the title of this workbook. Communities with a field of dreams approach a.k.a. “offer a weekend and they will come” approach, are doomed to frustration and extinction. We must be active in inviting people to the Renewal Weekend that can move a person’s faith journey forward.

Scatter shot approaches of distributing brochures, bulletin inserts, and newsletter announcements are doomed to fail without a strategy for personally inviting people. You won’t fully appreciate this if you don’t understand some fundamentals of persuasion and marketing. Worse than that, you’re going to invisibly blow using the strategies you are going to learn and be left wondering “Why am I not seeing any response?”

Critical Marketing Principles

Yes, I said “marketing”. Do you have an aversion to that term? If so, you aren’t alone. Many people particularly in the church, cringe at the word. Perhaps, because marketing sounds so commercial to the church and well, we are not a business. That said, I would invite you to let go of any prejudice around that word and consider marketing in its most basic sense.

Marketing is simple the process of effectively offering someone what you have of value so that they act on the offer. In business, marketing is offering a product and the act is purchasing. In the Pilgrimage community, you offer a weekend of spiritual renewal. Their act is to say, “Yes” and attend.

Let me be blunt. We stink at this. Mainly because we don’t understand or take into consideration the process most people must go through to get to yes and participation. We assume all we have to do is tell people an event is happening and they will flock to it. Unfortunately, recruitment doesn’t work that way, even if we announce a weekend in the bulletin, the newsletter, the website, in an email, from the pulpit, etc. Why?

Stages of Readiness

People must pass through “Stages of Readiness” to take action. These stages of readiness are often referred to with the acronym AIDA which stands for:

- Awareness
- Interest
- Desire
- Action

Let’s look at each in the context of someone deciding to attend a Pilgrimage weekend:

Awareness: She has to know the weekend exists. You have to communicate particulars, like when and where the weekend is, and perhaps what will happen during the weekend. Many church announcements do this and only this. In marketing these particulars are referred to as FEATURES.

Interest: She has to believe the weekend will be worth her time. You must capture the person’s curiosity. You need to present the VALUE of the offer. So she THINKS or FEELS this a renewal weekend might benefit her. Value can be removing a pain point and/or creating a gain. For example, “Attend a weekend and get refreshed by being served and spiritually fed.” Marketers refer to this as the BENEFITS.

Desire: She has to want to attend. You have to further connect with her NEED for the weekend and remove OBJECTIONS that may be holding her back. Desire sometimes won’t be present until a person has an event that heightens their sense of need.

Action: She has to respond positively. You need to ask for the ‘yes’ by presenting a CALL TO ACTION such as, fill out this registration form, go to the website and register, or give me a few details and I can have you registered right now.

Stage of Readiness	Audience Need	Marketers Role
Awareness	KNOW that the offer exists	Provide information about the FEATURES of the offer (At this stage printed material and announcements are helpful)
Interest	BELIEVE the offer may be worth the time/money/effort	Capture curiosity by presenting BENEFITS (Sharing your testimonial is your greatest tool for this stage. We will help you with creating and sharing your testimony.)
Desire	WANT the offer	Connect with the NEED and remove OBJECTIONS (Listening and “Profiling” is essential at this stage. Anticipating questions and providing answer is critical.)
Action	RESPOND to the offer	Present a CALL TO ACTION (You identify this stage with some “test the waters” that you’ll learn)

The Solution: Need/Benefit Focused Invitation

Do you see why most communities are failing?

Communities release announcements that usually only contain features. Then they expect people to leap from awareness to action. This isn't realistic. To successfully help someone navigate the stages of INTEREST and DESIRE the need for a weekend must be interpreted through the perspective of a person's unique spiritual need. A brochure cannot identify and respond to someone's need. But, you can and it is easier than you might think. You want to begin by considering the needs of people you know and how they may benefit.

Profiles of common spiritual needs

Following are just a few examples of 'profiles' of people who may benefit significantly from a renewal weekend. Who comes to mind for you as you read these descriptions?

Weary Servant - Someone who constantly is serving others, and may be exhausted. This person feels worn-out and is possibly becoming resentful.

- This person may BE SERVED

Burdened: Someone feeling guilt, shame, loss tragedy, etc. This person may have these feelings due to grief, substance abuse, or trauma. NOTE: If someone is burdened because of a tragedy or intense loss, it is possible to go to them too soon. Consider how recent the harm has occurred before asking them.

- This person may BE HEALED

Unemployed: This person begins to doubt self-worth, may be anxious, feel cut off or judged

- This person may receive GRACE and ENCOURAGEMENT, and return RENEWED and CONFIDENT of God's love.
- Also, this person may have time to attend, provided scholarships are available.

In a spiritual rut: This person is going through the motions, but feels uninspired or stuck in their journey.

- This person can BE INSPIRED, and ready to begin the next steps of their journey.

In church leadership: This person serves constantly, and can also serve as an encourager of others down the road.

- This person can BE SERVED, and can learn that the church can be energized by virtue of congregants attending a renewal weekend

New Members, or others who need broader connections: These people are searching for expanded Christian friends, for connection, and for next steps.

- These folks make LIFELONG FRIENDS, and connect with other Pilgrims at their new church.

Those who “hang back” but want to be involved: These people are bashful but want to help

- These people learn HOW they can be involved in their home church and community.

Exercise 1 – MAKE A LIST

ACTION STEP: Create a list of people who come to mind for you as having a spiritual need. Insert their name, description of what you believe their need may be, and how they might be feeling. Use more paper if necessary.

Name: _____

Need: _____

Feelings: _____

Name: _____

Need: _____

Feelings: _____

Name: _____

Need: _____

Feelings: _____

Name: _____

Need: _____

Feelings: _____

OPTIONAL ACTION STEP: Do this exercise with a renewal group. Discuss your lists and try to assign the “best person” to contact a potential Pilgrim. Best may be from a standpoint of the closest relationship, common interests, or who best understands the person’s needs.

Track contacts made with potential pilgrims. Make your lists accessible to all group members. Using a google document or similar tool can be helpful. Shared documents enable immediate and current access to the status of anyone being invited.

Now that you know who to invite let’s explore how to invite them.

Your Most Powerful Asset – Your Testimony/Experience

Your testimony for what Pilgrimage did for your own spiritual journey is essential. It's the glue that may successfully wed the needs and desires of the potential participant with the offer of going. Keep in mind that your testimony is not theirs, so their experience may be different.

You need to have your testimonial hip pocket ready to share. Also, you need to be prepared to speak to the need which the potential participant may feel as identified in the profiles. This is not as difficult as it may seem, but absolutely necessary.

NOTE: "Testimony" is a word that carries a lot of baggage for some people. Perhaps, you have been witnessed to in a way that felt manipulative or contrived. You don't want to be one of "those people." No worries. Complete the exercise on the next page and you will have the essentially elements you need to share your testimony/story in a conversational (not pushy or manipulative) manner. We will discuss how to share your testimony after you complete the exercise.

EXERCISE #2 – RECONNECTING WITH YOUR TESTIMONY

ACTION STEP: Answer the questions below. You may want to use other paper so as not to limit your answers.

1. Describe your situation or problem(s) you were dealing with prior to attending the pilgrimage weekend? And/or a describe what your faith was like prior to pilgrimage?

2. Describe how you felt?

3. What did you learn or experience on the weekend that helped you improve your situation or faith? How did God touch your life? (If this significant moment occurred

during one of the activities that you would prefer not to share with a prospective participant, like the service of healing and wholeness, go ahead and record your experience now anyways.)

4. How did your situation get better? What positive change did you experience in your situation or faith?

5. How did you feel after this change?

Congratulations! You just wrote all the essential elements of a compelling testimony. That wasn't so hard was it? If you want to see what this looks like all put together, then I have a secret to share. You already have. I used these exact questions to write a testimonial of my experience of Dwight's presentation. I used it in the introduction to this guide to spark your interest and desire to read the workbook. Remember reading this...

"Before Dwight's presentation I thought all I had to do was tell someone, "Hey, you should go on a pilgrimage weekend. You'll love it" and then hand them a brochure with all the details or direct them to the website and they would go.

Boy was I ever wrong. I couldn't understand why all of my joy, enthusiasm and encouragement didn't translate into them saying yes. It was frustrating and discouraging.

Through what you are about to learn I came to see how completely backwards and ineffective that approach was. In fact, the next day I put to work the tried and true strategies Dwight

shared and got an immediate yes from someone. Finally having someone eager to attend felt fantastic. You can do this too.”

Do you see the essential elements in the testimonial?

- Situation prior
- Feelings about it
- What I learned/experienced
- The change it created
- The new feelings

See how simple this is. When sharing your testimony capturing and sharing the feelings are critically important. INTEREST and DESIRE, the middle stages of readiness, are moved more by feelings than facts or features. Furthermore, your situation may not directly resonate with someone else’s need; yet, the emotional journey may readily.

For example, the weary church servant may be talking to an overwhelmed mom. She won’t necessarily connect with your experience of being at a thousand meetings, but she will definitely connect with the feeling of being overwhelmed and worn out. Your story of finding renewal and energy or being served will readily connect. She can track the emotional journey and find herself in your story IF you are sure to include those feelings.

Are you ready to go invite? Yes. You have your list, your testimony, and maybe even a little excitement. You have everything you need, but before you do let’s cover some nuts and bolts details about HOW to effectively invite.

Taking it to the Street: Nine Rookie Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Rookie Mistake #1: Referring to Pilgrimage as a retreat

Solution: Speak in terms of a renewal weekend

Language is loaded. So, be intentional about what you say. Speak about pilgrimage as a RENEWEL weekend not a RETREAT. While pilgrimage is a retreat style event, that language is loaded for many people. They will likely immediately pigeon hole their impressions based off prior retreat experiences. This can drive decision making. For example, they may think, “Well, I am already going on the women’s retreat in March, I don’t need this.”

Also, “retreat” is intrinsically a feature word with no persuasive value. “Renewal”, however, is a value word that in and of itself begins to speak to a need and the nature of the weekend.

ACTION STEP: If you speak about Pilgrimage as a retreat, replace that language with renewal weekend.

Rookie Mistake #2: Starting too late

- Solution: Begin at least 60 days out

Begin recruitment at least 60 days out. This may seem early. However, many people fill their calendars weeks in advance or must request time off work far in advanced. The longer you wait, the less available someone becomes.

Furthermore, there is every possibility you may need multiple conversations. Your first conversation may just get someone through the first stage or two of readiness, AWARENESS and INTEREST. A prospective pilgrim might have to check schedules and get back with you.

Lastly, though you want to start early for Spring renewal weekends wait until after January 1st. The holidays are too busy and filled with distractions for people to give your invitation the attention it requires. Similarly, for Fall retreats wait until after Labor Day. (Note: did you just see me commit rookie mistake #1. See how easy it is to say retreat.)

Rookie Mistake #3: Inviting after church or in passing

- Solution: Schedule time for an uninterrupted time to talk

Coming up to someone after church and saying, “Hey, there is a pilgrimage weekend coming up in April do you want to go?” is a bad idea. After church most people keep conversations as short. They are likely already busy and thinking about lunch or whatever is next on their list.

Instead request at time, saying, “I need to talk to you about something. When would be a good time to call?” Or, if you prefer meet over coffee, lunch, etc. The key is schedule a conversation that won’t be rushed. You want time to share your testimony, answer questions, and listen for the needs or concerns that are perhaps, holding them back from going. They may have a misimpression or wrong assumption that you can easily address, but only if you listen carefully.

Rookie Mistake #4: Leaving registration up to them to do later

- [Solution: Help them personally through the registration process](#)

When you call, have the registration form loaded and pre-populated with their data, ready to submit the moment they say “Yes.” Don’t expect them to complete the form. We must do it for them. This might feel pushy to you, but it’s actually quite the opposite.

If you pre-populate a form, once they say yes all you have to do is fill in a few blanks. Say something like, “Great. All I need to know for you to be registered is to answer a few simple questions. Do you have any allergies or dietary needs? Do you...,etc.” Contrast that experience to leaving it in their hands and then having to repeatedly ask them, “Hey, have you registered yet?” Odds are that’s what will take place if you don’t help them actually complete the registration.

Remember, gather ALL of this data BEFORE you call. You want it in hand, so when they say ‘yes’ you are ready to register them as quickly and easily as possible.

Rookie Mistake #5: Focusing on features rather than benefits

- [Solution: Lead with your testimony and focus on benefits](#)

When you call lead with your testimony. The FEELING that the weekend could be valuable to them is what MOTIVATES them to eagerly want to attend, not how many days it is, where it’s held, how much it costs, etc. Those factors are secondary in terms of their desire to attend or not. Again, be prepared to speak to any spiritual need you are aware of.

Rookie Mistake #6: Being cryptic what happens on the weekend

- [Solution: Offer as much clarity as you can without give away spoilers](#)

Someone is almost sure to ask, “What’s the weekend like?” or “What do you do?” One of the worse things you can do is be evasive about what happens on the weekend. Don’t answer questions with replies like, “I can’t say, I don’t want to spoil any of the surprises.” Don’t even hint at there being “hidden” or “surprise” elements. This immediately will make many people wary or uncomfortable.

Describing some specifics is fine, such as, “People start arriving on Thursday evening around 5 and we gather for a little lemonade party before to get to know one another. Then we head to dinner 6. We will have worship and communion each day. Also, we will have talks mostly led by lay people and then opportunities to discuss the talks, etc.

Be prepared to answer questions about logistics, such as: Dress is comfortable. Wear what you would to be comfortable at home this isn’t a dress to impress occasion. Rooms are hotel-style (roommate likely), food is good. Plan on not being done until 5pm on Sunday, etc.

Again the thing to keep in mind here is that the DESIRE to go will be based upon their FEELING of value in the experience. Dwelling on logistical questions offers little motivation value. However, be aware that those small concerns can easily become deal breaking objections if you do not provide the clarity they need.

Lastly, many people are much more comfortable knowing someone else they know is attending. If you are going leverage that. Let them know, "I have volunteered to staff this Renewal, it would honor me if you let me serve you!" Or, let them know about others coming, "Jan's also coming from our church." Each person they know expands their personal comfort zone and lends social proof to the experience.

Rookie Mistake #7: Pushing 'yes' to quickly.

- Solution: Use "trial closes" to gauge desire.

If you share your testimony and they are ask for more details, odds are they are teetering somewhere between the stages of INTEREST and DESIRE. They may even be trying to move from DESIRE to ACTION. Once most of those questions are answered now is the time to test the waters for whether they are ready to say yes. Ask questions such as:

- How is it sounding so far?
- So, can I sign you up?
- I have most of the form filled out, we can do it now?

NOTE: If they would love to go, but have a conflict with the dates, be prepared to go ahead and sign them up for the next one right then. Say, "That's not a problem the next one is Oct. # - #, we can go ahead and register you now. If something comes up, canceling is not a problem, but it would be better to secure your seat now so you don't miss out."

Rookie Mistake #8: Not pursuing additional leads

Solution: Ask, "Is there anyone you've thought about going with you."

This one line can literally multiple your recruiting efforts. If the prospective pilgrim thinks of someone, offer to call that person. The more people who go, the more other people will want to go.

Rookie Mistake #9: Giving up after someone says no

- Solution: Regarding "No" as "No, not now."

People say no for many reasons. Research has shown that people have to hear about something seven times before taking action on it. I hope you understand why now. Those stages of readiness are a real and unavoidable reality.

Your prospective pilgrim may need the offer many times before they recognize the value and feel the desire to go. That's okay. This need for repetition is just human nature. That said, if you

practice the techniques shared in this guide, you will likely dramatically cut the need for multiple contacts.

The other factor at play (which you have no control over) is the person's spiritual need. People will go when the pain of their need intersects with the possibility of relief on a weekend and NOT before. Consider this...

One study showed that 99% of first time guests in worship had a precipitant event within two months prior to their first visit. In other words, they had a death, job change, move, birth of a child, trauma, or some other major change. Those precipitant events put them in a mode of seeking a deeper connection with God. In another study 100% had a precipitant event.

The bottom line of this is God's good timing isn't always our timing. God will call someone on a weekend when the need is there. Our job is to keep our ears and eyes wide open to see those needs, so that God can use us to call them when the time is right.

Don't give up. I was on a weekend recently with a woman who was invited for thirteen years straight before saying yes. The weekend changed her life. What if someone had given up after the first time, or even in the twelfth year?

Making it Happen

All the plans and intentions in the world mean nothing if you don't execute. On the following three pages is an annotated check list to help you immediately take action. Start those action steps now or set an appointment on your calendar with yourself to do so later. What gets scheduled, gets done. What gets intended, gets delayed.

EXECUTION CHECKLIST

1: Get the “Scattering Shooting Methods” covered

In the beginning of this guide, we mentioned that none of the measures of bulletin inserts, brochures, newsletter articles, etc. would get someone to register, BUT they do play a critical role by smoothing the way for you to invite. They can handle a lot of the information/awareness elements of helping someone toward attending a weekend.

Here are a few basics that you should make sure are covered in your church:

- Calendars (church and Presbytery: make sure the next TWO Weekends are on those calendars)
- Assure presence on Church website (adult discipleship tab?)
- Provide online registration for either of the next two Weekends
- Place brochures and registration forms in church and keep replenished
- Include pilgrimage in church announcements periodically
- Include an article about pilgrimage in church newsletters two months prior to the weekend
- Have recent participants share about their experience

Check off any or all of these you can and regularly revisit them, probably, at least once a quarter.

Step 2: Complete your list if you haven’t already. (See Exercise #1)

- I have completed my list, noting possible spiritual needs and feelings of the prospect.
- Optional: I have shared my list with a reunion group or an accountability partner.
- Optional: We have shared our lists using a tool like google documents.

Step 3: Prepare to share your testimonial. (See Exercise #2)

- I have answered the testimonial questions and can share my story conversationally.
- Optional: I have verbally shared my experience with a renewal group or another pilgrim.

Step 4: Decide when you will speak to prospective pilgrims

Complete the following sentence for each prospective pilgrim and place a reminder on your calendar or in your phone. Place a check in the check box once you have contacted each one.

I will ask _____ on _____ when I call or visit with her/him.
(name) (date)

I will ask _____ on _____ when I call or visit with her/him.
(name) (date)

I will ask _____ on _____ when I call or visit with her/him.
(name) (date)

Step 5: Gather data for the first prospective member you are going to contact.

The last page of this guide is a registration form for an Arkansas Presbyterian Pilgrimage Renewal Weekend. Fill that out NOW for the first person you are going to invite. Then remove the page and put it in a prominent place as a reminder to follow-up and invite the person. Each time you see it pray for the prospect and God's guidance for inviting that person. Check the box below once you've finished. If you are from another renewal weekend community, download its registration form and use for this step.

- I have completed the registration form as much as I can and placed it in a prominent place as a reminder.
- Optional: Download additional forms and complete for other prospects.

Step 6: Review your progress.

For year's I set annual goals and found that my progress was feast and famine on which ones got done. Some would just fall off my radar completely. That changed completely once I began a weekly review. You don't have to review your progress necessarily on a weekly basis, but decide now when you will follow-up with yourself. For example,

- I will review my progress every Sunday before church.
- I will review my progress when I meet with my renewal group.
- I will review my progress every two weeks.

Optional: You can dramatically increase your chances for successfully following through by reviewing progress with another pilgrim or a renewal group. Accountability is very good for sustained progress.

I plan to review my progress _____.
(interval or date)

Optional: I will review my progress with _____.

A word about what to do as a review....

Your review doesn't need to be complicated. It can be as simple as considering these three questions:

- What did I last do to invite Bob/Jan/Sally, etc?
- What worked well?
- What could I have done better?
- What should I do next and when?
- Other observations?

Write out your review. I cannot emphasize this enough. You will be tempted to just think about these questions. From years of doing weekly reviews on goals, I can promise you not writing is a HUGE mistake. You do not have to get fancy. For example, you might write:

"I asked Bob Sunday after church when I could call him. I called last Thursday. He seemed very interested but said he needed to check his calendar. I planned on pre-filling a registration form for him but forgot to do that. I'm going to do that this afternoon, so I don't forget or get busy and fail to get it done. I'm calling him back Friday to see if the dates or clear. I need to also let him know that Mark said he is going for sure. He seemed mostly concerned about the time he would have to take off."

Recording this information will be SUPER invaluable. These records remind you of what you have and haven't done. This becomes particularly important if invite a prospective pilgrim multiple time or if you are inviting multiple people. You don't want to confuse where people are in the process or people's need.

In fact, reviewing is so important I have added it as a check box and not one that is optional. Reviewing may sound like a lot of work. It's not. Give it a try and you will rapidly see the value.

- I wrote out my first review notes.

Step 7: [Rejoice when someone says yes.](#)

MY FIRST PROSPECT SAID YES!

Step 8: [Follow additional leads](#)

- I asked, "Have you thought about anyone you would like to go with you?"
- I have started following steps #4 through #8 with this new prospect by setting up a time to call or visit.

In Conclusion

At the end of the day, God calls and moves the hearts of people to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to attending a renewal week. You are likely the critical component in that call. Someone must bridge the gap between AWARENESS and ACTIONS. If not you, then who?

I hope you see now how successfully inviting people is a skill set. The skill set is learnable and repeatable. You can do this. Don’t get legalistic about this process though. What you have in your hand is a roadmap. You’re going to encounter detours. Sometimes you will find short-cuts. The Holy Spirit may call you off the beaten path. But in the meantime and in between, try following this roadmap as presented. These are tried and true processes.

Again, I want to thank Dwight Nichols for his excellent webinar presentation that was both the inspiration for creating this workbook and the source for probably 80% of the content. Thank you Dwight.

If you have questions about the guide, suggestions for improving it, or corrections needed, please feel to contact me at john@thepracticaldisciple.com.

Also, if you would be interested in meeting online to work through these steps in a live webinar contact myself or Clay Parton at cparton01@gmail.com.

May God bless your recruiting efforts to His Glory,

John Arnold
Zionsville Great Banquet #30, Table of Paul * clap *