

Developing an Annual Sermon Schedule

For the last 20 years of my ministry as Senior Pastor at Kentwood Community Church (KCC) I sought to develop an annual sermon schedule. For a dozen or more of those years I would do this work individually, usually in a series of summer getaways (a couple of days at a time). For the last 8 years, I included other members of the Teaching Team on a multiple day retreat. The process tended to unfold as follows.

Throughout the year I kept a “Sermon & Series Idea File” (my Homiletics Professor, Dr. Lee Haines, called this a “homiletical garden” of seeds planted from which sermons sprouted). Into this file I would place magazine articles, book tables of content, ideas from media, insights from Bible study, things I heard from other pastors, etc. – becoming raw material of sermons and series.

There was considerable time spent in prayer and in self-examination. As preachers there is a tendency to project our own pressing needs, special interests or “hobby horses” into a priority place on the preaching schedule. Times of listening prayer prepared planners to hear from God and to put our congregation’s needs above our own.

A “calendar” of concepts that informed how many series and how long the series might be was developed. It often looked something like this:

Labor Day → Thanksgiving: one or two series

Thanksgiving → Christmas: Advent series

New Year’s Day → Ash Wednesday: New Year’s series

Ash Wednesday → Easter: Lenten series

Easter to Mother’s Day or Father’s Day: often a “relationship” series

Father’s Day → Labor Day: one or two summer series.

In a typical year, there would be 7 to 9 series and a half a dozen stand-alone messages. Potential guest speakers and theme weekends were plugged in.

An attempt was made to identify what our congregation needed to hear. This included such things as feedback that had been received from congregants, an assessment of needs that seemed to be prevalent in the congregation, areas of our mission and vision that need to be highlighted in the minds of the church family, the “season” our church was in, etc.

In a desire to teach the “whole counsel of God” we looked at the balance between Bible Book based series and topical series (with expository sermons developed related to the topics).

Based on the calendar, the assessment of our congregation and the overview of Scripture, ideas were prayerfully and tentatively placed in the various calendar slots. This would often lead to trying many ideas in many calendar spots, then eventually first and second choice possibilities were created for each series.

Once the series had been placed on the calendar giving an idea of potential length, sermon subjects within each series with appropriate texts

Freedom was always taken if the Spirit led differently as the year unfolded, but this advanced planning helped the preparation process be as long-term as possible.

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