



Neighbourhood
gatherings and
building bridges



1. Long-term thinking 4



2. Faith is a Journey..... 5



3. Preparation..... 8



3. Food 15



4. Conversation starters 19



5. Building bridges..... 22



6. Swap-up 25



7. Kids activities 28



8. Follow up 30

Introduction

Easter is a wonderful time of the year. The community usually enjoys a holiday, a time of reflection, and then feasting and celebration.

It can be difficult to know how to approach Easter in our own communities. This guide aims to shine a light on the Easter message of Jesus in a marketplace of many different ideas.

You will need to be sensitive and wise with your neighbours but there are some wonderful things you can do together to put a spotlight on Jesus' timeless message. Your greatest assets are prayer as you prepare and hospitality and generosity.

Hopefully these ideas will inspire you, and your family, and draw your community to our loving Saviour.





1. Long-term thinking

What is the long-term goal of the neighbourhood?

There is no doubt that we all want our communities to be safe and for everyone to flourish. Most people can unite around these two goals.

People have different backgrounds and not everyone is ready to hear the Gospel of Jesus right now. We often need to clear rocks off the path that may cause stumbling (making it safe) before we can share about life with Jesus (helping people to flourish).

So how do we help others move on a cleared path towards Jesus?



2. Faith is a Journey

Here is a helpful way to look at people on a journey towards Jesus.



Three Early Steps in the Journey

In Acts 17:32-34 we see examples of the first three categories of the journey:

1. **No interest** – Those who are opposed or haven't considered God and faith.
2. **Seeker** – Those who are asking questions and searching for God in the scriptures.
3. **Ready to believe** – Those who have satisfied themselves that Jesus is Lord and understand that this requires a personal response.

Three Later Steps in the Journey

The next categories merge on a continuum as a believer grows in Bible knowledge, intimacy with Jesus, and influence in leadership. There are many examples in scripture:

4. **New believer** – Growing as a disciple of Jesus and telling others (Acts 8:26-40).
5. **Growing believer** – Growing as a disciple-maker (Colossians 1:3-8, 1 Tim 6:11-21).
6. **Mature believer** – Growing as a maker of disciple-makers (2 Timothy 3:10-17).

Building Trust and Friendship

Plan any gatherings recognising that people are on a journey. Aim to build trust and openness. Consider an all-year plan spiced with many types of neighbour interactions.

Approach any Easter neighbourhood gathering as part of this bigger strategy of bringing safety and trust to the community and ultimately, to introduce them to Jesus.





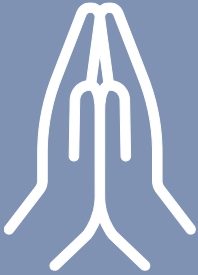
3. Preparation

Colossians 4:2-6 is a helpful model for how to go about planning a community gathering.

Devote yourselves to **prayer**, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may **open a door** for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may **proclaim it clearly**, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your **conversation** be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. *Col 4:2-6 (NIV)*

Four Steps in the Passage

It can be summarized in these four parts:



1. Pray

Pray for your
community



2. Open a Door

Take or make
opportunities to
connect



3. Wise conversation

Make good
conversations your
goal



4. Proclaim clearly

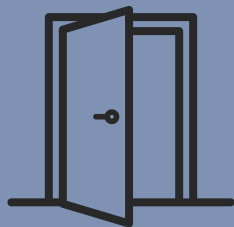
1. Pray



Five creative ways to pray

- Think about the needs of your community. Pray about how you could respond.
- Draw a prayer map of your neighbourhood and make notes about the people you want to reach (What do you know? How can you pray?)
- Go for prayer walks around the local streets – be intentional about greeting and engaging people on the walk.
- Ask your church family to pray for this strategy and invite them to try it at the same time in their local area.
- Pray at the same time every day for your neighbours.

2. Open a Door



Six ways to engage with your community

- Make your home a safe and welcoming place.
- Walk streets to pray, chat, and clean up rubbish.
- Make a street book-swap library.
- Organise ways for the community to connect well.
- Mow lawns or do gardening for those who are less mobile and ask others to help.
- Join community groups such as bush regeneration or the bush fire brigade.

3. Conversations



Six ways to be wise in conversation

- Resist the urge to preach.
- Be a listener.
- Ask good, open-ended questions.
- Help people talk by saying, “tell me about yourself” or “can you tell me more about that?”
- Invite good conversations where you can share reasons for your own hope.
- Make the conversations tasty and salty.
(Colossians 4:5-6)

4. Proclaim clearly

Five ways to talk about Jesus



- “Can I pray for you?” is a way to start a caring conversation of trust.
- You can proclaim Jesus by thinking carefully about the things you put around your house. Bible verses, kids’ projects, art works, books and decorations can all point people to Jesus and proclaim him. These items can start conversations as people are curious.
- As the Holy Spirit leads you, and as people ask, tell someone your own journey of discovering Jesus. Your own story cannot be disputed.
- Write people a thank you note after the event. Let them know that God has been generous to you in giving them as your neighbours.
- Wear a T-shirt that makes people curious and could start a conversation.





3. Food

Food is central for successful gatherings. It helps people relax, it meets a real need, and it provides more time for everyone to connect. It also allows good conversations to happen.



Food ideas

Four ideas for food



- Provide the meat – e.g. a lamb on a spit – invite neighbours to bring anything else that goes with slow-barbequed lamb.
- Pot-luck – everyone brings a dish to share. The dish could say something about cultural heritage or favourite foods.
- Everyone brings ingredients and together makes dishes like pizzas, salads, fruit salads etc.
- Simple and inexpensive foods are more successful.

Food strategy

Other ideas to consider



Think about how to seat people to get the result you want

- Sit around one very long table.
- Sit people in smaller groups – or on picnic rugs.
- Everyone mingles and finds their own place.

Food can also be used for fun and to create activity

- Fun challenge – eat a hot cross bun without your hands, leaving just the cross uneaten.
- Easter egg hunt and egg juggling contest.
- Egg and spoon race.



Rock clearing and connection

In a country town in Australia, James and Min borrowed a BBQ trailer, supplied the meat, and invited all the neighbours in their street to come and have an evening picnic in their yard.

They decorated the edge of the street with candles and celebrated the end of the year. The folks who lived in that street had been there for years and had never done anything like it before.

It was a *rock clearing exercise*. People brought food to share, camping chairs and tables, and were treated to company, conversation and deeper connection.





4. Conversation starters

We live in a society with many differing ideas. For example, people have different thoughts on what Easter means to them. It is helpful to approach conversations about Easter in a *marketplace of ideas*.

The following conversation starters allow people to share from their own experience. Any believers in the conversation can share their own faith stories within this marketplace of ideas.

Questions



Four ways to start conversations

- What gives you hope?
- When have you needed a fresh start in life?
- When have you been most surprised by generosity?
- How is Easter important to you?



You could try the *ChatMats* available on Max7.org to help start conversations. This can be fun when there's a wide range of ages, or you want to push conversations out of narrow or worn paths. Search "chatmats" on max7.org.





5. Building bridges

Spiritual bridges – Work out some ‘spiritual bridges’ for friendly conversations. Decide the most common questions people ask. Work out how to move to a spiritual conversation. Discover more from the Bible wherever possible.

Bridge Tools



Ways to guide a conversation

'4S' Tool – Practice moving the conversation from a **simple** conversation to a **serious one** in a natural way. Then from serious reflections, to **spiritual**, and then to a **scriptural** conversation using a Bible app on your phone. You may finish with an invitation, 'When would you have 20 minutes for me to show how you can discover God in the Bible together with your family?'

simple	serious
scriptural	spiritual

Remember: it's okay to build trust with the first two steps of the bridge. Some people are not ready or curious about spiritual or scriptural conversations.



Conversations and bridge building

Roy and Wendy had a very diverse group of neighbours and some friends around for a simple gathering. “Many were unbelievers. There were games in the backyard – volleyball and shuttlecock. Kids and adults played together. We cooked up a BBQ and everyone brought a salad to share. As we were about to start the meal, I simply asked everyone to try and ask three different people this simple question sometime during the afternoon: *‘With the world the way it is, what gives you hope?’*

“Everyone had a chance to have individual conversations. They were real and free flowing. In fact, people just wanted to keep talking and didn’t want to go home.

“Jesus turned up naturally in many conversations all over the place that afternoon along with other world views. He was relevant in the marketplace of ideas”.





6. Swap-up

The great swap

We can look at the Easter story as the greatest swap in history. Jesus got what we deserved – pain and punishment, and we got what He deserved – life and hope.

You can explore the theme of swapping with these activities.

- Bring a recipe to swap
- Bring stories to swap
- Do a trash and treasure swap



Swap-up challenge with kids

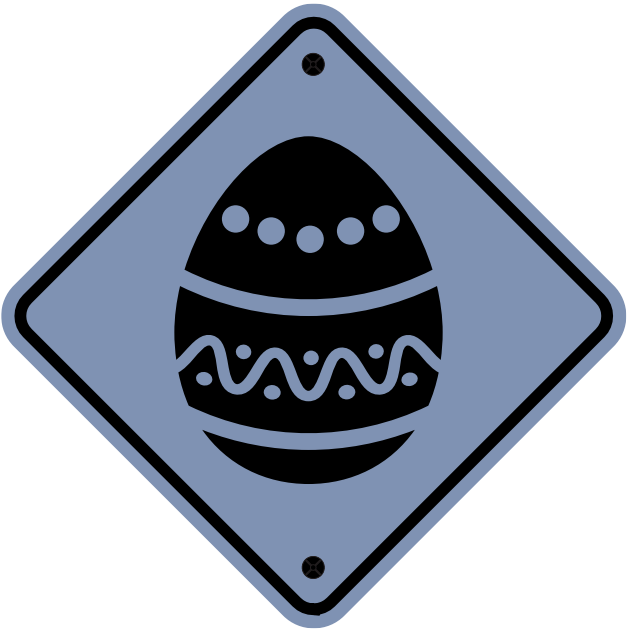
The week before Easter, gather the kids in the neighbourhood together. Give them a challenge with a paper clip, a small coin or a small toy. During the week they must find ways to swap the object they've been given for something better. This process continues as they keep swapping the current object for something better. They are **swapping up**. At the Easter gathering see the results of the challenge and celebrate their swaps.

For inspiration see:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1_OoICS2b8







7. Activities for kids

Egg hunt

Hunt for small eggs or tokens. At the end, bring all the kids together. Tell them you will swap every small egg/token



for something else, but don't tell them what it is. One child will likely take the risk. When they hand you all their small eggs give them the same number of bigger ones in return. The others will follow.

Ask them: 'How did this make you feel?'



Pass the parcel

Prepare a parcel with a small egg and a funny challenge at each layer.

Pinata

Make a pinata full of small easter eggs. Kids can be blindfolded and have turns at hitting the pinata with a stick or bat until the eggs fall out.



Face painting

If someone has skills in face painting, put them to work. Maybe create Easter eggs designs!

Chalk drawing

Encourage chalk drawing about Easter on the driveway or a concrete pathway.





8. Follow up

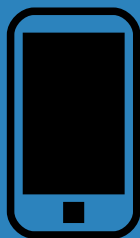
When something positive comes from a neighbourhood gathering, it's great to be able to continue to build on friendly foundations.

Here are some ideas:

- Before people leave, let them know what gathering is coming up next. Everyone has this to look forward to!
- Do you have contact details to stay in touch? Ask people privately so they can give what they feel comfortable sharing.
- Keep walking and praying, chatting and connecting.

Follow Up

Five ways to keep going



- Let the people who prayed for you know how it went. Pray and praise God together for his help and faithfulness.
- Drop a note from your family in your neighbours' letterboxes, thanking them for a fun time.
- Meet with your household and share observations, ideas and challenges you would like to address for the next gathering.
- Adjust any future plans based on what you have learned.
- Expect that others may want to host in future, or have ideas about how to do a neighbourhood gathering. Be open to sharing responsibility with other households for future gatherings.



HE IS NOT
here



HE IS
Risen



HE IS NOT
here



HE IS
RISEN

HE IS
Risen



HE IS
RISEN



HE IS
RISEN

HE IS
Risen



HE IS
RISEN

HE IS
RISEN

Risen

HE IS
Risen

HE IS NOT
here



HE IS
RISEN

Risen

HE IS
Risen

HE IS NOT
here