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Tom Holladay, executive and teaching pastor at Saddleback Church

Building your church calendar around God's purposes by Tom Holladay

If your church is serious about balancing the purposes, your calendar will show it. Churches committed to God's purposes of worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism will have calendars that reflect those purposes.

How do you take steps toward building your calendar around the purposes?

1. Assign a purpose to all of your calendared events. Ask yourself which purpose each of your events is focused on. But be honest! If you can't remember the last time an unbeliever came to your Fourth of July celebration, it's not an evangelism event. It probably belongs with fellowship. As you begin doing this, you'll probably find more events on the fellowship side of the ledger than some of the other purposes. This process will allow everyone to see that pretty clearly. It will also enable your church to begin to get your calendar balanced.

2. Stop doing events that don't have a purpose connected to it. When you come to an event you can't link to one of the purposes, don't do it. I know it's difficult to take some of these events off of the calendar. The most difficult events to stop doing are those you continue to do just because of tradition. But whenever you can stop them, do it!

3. Add some new purpose-centered events. One of the ways to stop doing something that has no purpose is to put purposeful event in its place. You're probably going to discover as you go through your calendar that you need to emphasize one of the purposes, such as evangelism or discipleship, in a new way.

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4. Determine the best times to emphasize certain purposes. As you go through this process, you're going to realize that there are prime times to emphasize evangelism. You don't want to have big

evangelistic events in July and August. That's when people are on vacation. Easter, on the other hand, is a great time for evangelism events. January is a great month to emphasize discipleship. People are ready to grow, to get going again.

5. Practice zero-balance calendaring. This is tough. At the end of every year, wipe the slate clean and say, "What do we want to do next year?" "What are the things that we did last year that were successful and we want to put back on the schedule again?" And ask yourselves if there are events you need to get rid of as well. You'll need to eliminate certain events to make room for even better ones. Sometimes we even have to get rid of very successful events. Why? To make room for better, more purposeful events.

In most of our churches, we're adding one or two good events each year. And the good events are killing us. There are so many good things to do this year that you don't have time to do new things. You don't have time to do any planning. You don't have time to work out any strategy because you're just adding more and more good things. But we've got to make tough decisions. We have a limited amount of time in any given year. And we want to make our time count.