

20,000 Churches Band Together to Invite America Back to Church

This September, around 20,000 churches will reach out to 10 million unchurched Americans for National Back to Church Sunday.

According to a recent article in *The Washington Times*, having an active spiritual life is one of the best ways to be happier and live longer. The *Times* article reported that those who attend church regularly tend to live an average of 35 percent longer than those who do not.

A Barna survey also shows that people who participate in faith-based communities are more optimistic, less stressed and believe they are making a positive difference in the world. Yet the number of Americans who identify as “unchurched” or “dechurched” has steadily increased over the past decade.

The goal this year for National Back to Church Sunday, the single-largest annual community outreach in the nation, is to get 20,000 churches involved—churches of varying backgrounds, worship styles and spirituality—to reach 10 million people with an invitation to come back to church.

Since its inception in the fall of 2009, the number of churches participating in National Back to Church Sunday has increased exponentially. In 2010, the number doubled from 3,800 to 7,600. In 2012, that number skyrocketed to over 13,100 churches inviting approximately 7.5 million friends, family, neighbors and co-workers to attend church.

“Inviting America back to church is not an insurmountable task,” says Eric Abel, vice president of marketing at Outreach, Inc.

According to Thom Rainer's book *The Unchurched Next Door*, "82 percent of people will come to church if they are invited by a trusted relative or friend. The numbers are similar for those who are counted among the 'de-churched'—people who used to attend church regularly, but for one reason or another, have stopped going."

To help churches succeed in this effort, National Back to Church Sunday provides an interactive website with free resources. There is a National Back to Church Sunday Church Kit, which offers a step-by-step approach to prepare for the event. One of the highlights of the kit is the viral video "Pastor Rap." These tools are designed to encourage church members to invite their family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers to come back to church.

Last fall, a National Back to Church Sunday survey showed that participating churches experienced a 38 percent increase in average church attendance, and 97 percent of pastors that responded to the survey said they would participate again in 2013.

"Enabling people to extend a simple invitation to family, friends and co-workers has had a huge impact not only on our attendance, but on the sense of hope in our congregation," reports Redeemer Lutheran Church. "And being a smaller church, hope is sometimes in short supply when it comes to attendance. We will definitely be participating again next year. This was a great experience for us and has really sparked our evangelism efforts."