

# Ready. Set. Sow.

A COMPREHENSIVE HOW-TO-GUIDE  
FOR THE PARISH BOOK PROGRAM



Dynamic Catholic

## MAXIMIZE YOUR IMPACT

Over the 15 years we've been doing the Parish Book Program, we've gotten feedback from moms and dads, catechists and teachers, ministry leaders and small group facilitators, pastors and even bishops. We've tested best practices by partnering with parishes directly; we've implemented the program in a 5000-family parish in California, a 1000-family parish in Baltimore, a 600-person parish in Clinton Township, Michigan. We've seen it all.

That's why we've compiled this comprehensive how-to-guide that will empower you to maximize the impact in your parish.

This guide contains proven methods for getting the Book Program right in three key areas:

- 1. Before Launch**
- 2. On Christmas and Easter**
- 3. Following Up**

Simply follow these steps and you will ignite incredible transformation in your parish that lasts long after Christmas and Easter.

## BEFORE LAUNCH

Having a transformative Book Program experience begins long before Christmas and Easter Mass! Here are six essential considerations and one bonus tip to help you prepare for [your biggest evangelization opportunity of the year](#).

### 1. Order Enough Books

Generosity begets generosity. Parishes who distribute enough books for at least 2/3 of families create a much different experience than ones where books are spread thin and everyone has to share. When the parish is generous, the people are generous in return.

Think about it this way. When a family comes to Mass on Christmas or Easter, maybe the wife is highly engaged and the husband is disengaged. If they just get one book for the family, the husband might think he doesn't have to read it or it isn't really for him. Put a book in both of their hands and the message is clear: we want everyone in our parish to have this book. This message of generosity is incredibly powerful.

**Bonus tip:** The more generous the people who are already committed to their parish and their faith are, the more the people on the fringes will be encouraged to come back.

### 2. Start Praying

The moment you [order books for your parish](#), start praying for the people who receive them! Think about it: you don't know who is going to show up for Christmas or Easter Mass. Some of the people in the pews will be local, some will be visitors. Some will be engaged Catholics, some have probably been away from Mass for years. Start praying to the Holy Spirit that each person at Mass will be open to the message they need to hear from the book. Each book you hand out is like sowing a seed. Ultimately, you don't control what happens once you plant it. That's God's territory. Start praying that God will use those seeds to ignite incredible transformation!

## BEFORE LAUNCH (CONTINUED)

### 3. Recruit the Right Volunteers

Once you get the book, it all comes down to the person giving the book. You can have the most attractive, most intriguing, most accessible book ever, but if it's given by a distracted, frustrated, or disgruntled person, it's like offering a steak on a garbage can lid. Same goes for just leaving the books at the back of the church. If you signal that the books aren't important enough to hand out, why would your parishioners think they are important enough to take with them? So, invite your most joyful, on-fire, generous families and individuals to personally hand out the books. It also doesn't hurt to have some smiling kids passing out books. They're hard to say no to!

Logistically, it's best to recruit up to three volunteers for each entrance to your Church: two to hand out books and one to keep them stocked. You will also need a point person. You could run out of books, a volunteer could not show up, someone may be confused about their role, so having a point person to address these things is key. It doesn't matter if it's the same person across Masses or a new person at each Mass, but definitely have a point person!

Remember: planting seeds works best when it feels personal and inviting. Build a team that embodies that.

**Bonus tip:** Here are three quick ways for you to recruit volunteers.

1. Make an ask during Mass and use Sign Up Genius to get people onboard.
2. Ask ministry leaders to take the lead having each Mass sponsored by a different ministry.
3. Make personal and direct invitations.

### 4. Let the Book Speak for Itself

You will have a massive temptation to do the one thing that has sunk more book programs than any other mistake. That's putting an advertisement in the book.

## BEFORE LAUNCH (CONTINUED)

The desire to put an ad in the book inviting people to a future event or program comes from a great place. It comes from a place of wanting people to come back, get more involved, see for themselves that there is something for everyone at your parish. Those are all good things. But that is rarely how it is received.

An ad can make the book feel less like a gift and more like a trojan horse for some other agenda. It risks alienating people from the book before they ever get a chance to read a word. Let the book speak for itself.

**Bonus tip:** Don't wrap it either. While it may be thoughtful, wrapping the book prevents people from reading the book before Mass while they wait. It also hides the cover and mutes reactions to the title, which are meant to draw people into the experience of the book. Yes, it may seem like a nicer gift, but it's not a present, it's a seed!

### 5. Hand the Books Out Before Mass

We've seen it all here. We've seen parishes hand the books out the Sunday before Christmas or Easter so all the "real parishioners" get the books first. We've seen the books left on a sad, tiny, sagging table at the back of Church. We've seen parishes hand them out during Mass. We've seen them handed out after Mass. And we've seen it done when people are walking in.

While the most important thing is making sure everyone gets their gift, the best way to maximize the impact is to hand out the books before Mass.

First, it creates a welcoming atmosphere when people arrive. Remember, a third of people coming to Christmas and Easter don't plan on returning any other days. How do you want them to feel when they walk in?

## BEFORE LAUNCH (CONTINUED)

Second, people are more likely to start reading the book while they wait for Mass to start. Like we said earlier, once people start reading the book, they are more likely to have a trigger experience!

Third, people arrive at Mass at different times so it's easier to ensure everyone gets personally handed a book before Mass. After Mass, everyone floods out at once and it can be hard to hand everyone a copy.

**Bonus tip:** The only exception to the before Mass rule is a parish that gave the books out right after the Gospel. The pastor opened the book to a section and invited the parishioners to do the same, read a section, and preached his message off the book. We've only seen it once and it was extraordinarily powerful.

### 6. Spread the Word

Who are the 20 most influential people in your parish? Every parish has a set of influencers—people of possibility, people who inspire others to take action, people who make things happen.

Your receptionist might be one. The deacon might be another. Or maybe the most influential person is that mother who seems to volunteer for every parish initiative. Whoever it is in your parish, get them on board with the Book Program and amazing things will happen. Give the most influential people in your parish a copy of the book early and invite them to spread the word.

When the book becomes a topic of conversation in the life of your parish, it deepens the impact!

**Bonus tip:** We've also seen a parish promote the book prior to Mass by having the pastor read a section of it to get people excited in the weeks leading up to Christmas and Easter. It had a huge impact.

## BEFORE LAUNCH (CONTINUED)

You could also put an announcement in your bulletin or make an announcement from the pulpit in the weeks leading up to Christmas and Easter Mass.

So those are the six essential keys to success.

1. Order Enough Books
2. Start Praying
3. Recruit the Right Volunteers
4. Let the Book Speak for Itself
5. Hand Out the Books Before Mass
6. Spread the Word

Get these six things right and you'll get the Parish Book Program right.



## ON CHRISTMAS AND EASTER

So it's the day to launch the Parish Book Program! It's time to plant some seeds. We hope you're excited! Let's look at 10 ways to make sure this day is a huge success for your parish.

1. Ask your volunteers to arrive 30 minutes early. If someone doesn't show up or you need extra help, don't panic. Your point person can always ask someone they know to help out.
2. Remind everyone of the importance of their role and thank them for their time. Encourage them to smile and be as welcoming as possible.
3. Have the books out of storage before volunteers arrive, making them easily accessible for your book givers.
4. Plan to hand the books out before Mass as people come in. Confirm that all your volunteers are set up at every entrance of the church.
5. If anyone got to Mass before you started handing out books, have a book brought to them in their pew.
6. Make an announcement at Mass inviting parishioners to read the book. This message can go in the bulletin as well.
7. Have one book giver stay near the entrance after Mass begins for latecomers.
8. After Mass, have the volunteers collect books left behind and any leftovers for redistribution at the next Mass.
9. If there are any leftover books at the end of all the Masses, collect them and store them in an accessible spot.\*
10. Congratulate yourself and thank your volunteers for helping make a real and powerful impact in people's lives.

If you follow these ten steps, you will reach people where they are and plant a



## ON CHRISTMAS (CONTINUED)

seed in their hearts.

\*If you have leftover books, schedule a meeting with your team to make a plan for how best to distribute the books in the following weeks. You could:

- Send the books home with religious education students and parents.
- Have them available the following Sunday for people who were traveling for the holiday.
- Give another copy to your parishioners the following Sunday and ask them to share it with one person in their life.
- Give the books as a welcome gift for all new parishioners for the rest of the year.
- Give books to confirmation students on their retreat.
- Ask your team: *How can we use this book to create a powerful moment of engagement for someone who really needs it?* Some inspiring creativity has come from asking that question!

## FOLLOWING UP

Here's the truth: you could have a perfectly successful Christmas or Easter Book Program at your parish by just handing out the books at Mass. There's nothing else you have to do after Christmas and Easter. Why? The books work. For over 15 years, we've partnered with 10,000+ parishes to distribute over 60 million books—and we know for a fact that simply handing out the right book at the right time changes lives.

But if you'd like to capitalize on the momentum the Book Program brings to your parish, here are a few steps that will make an enormous difference long after Christmas and Easter are over:

### **1. Use the Book in Homilies**

Simply mentioning the book during the homily is a great way to remind parishioners to read it and reiterate the message. Even more powerful, you can use the book as reference material during the homily. Encourage people to bring the book to Mass so you can read excerpts and reflect on it during the homily. We've found that parishes that utilize the book at Mass for the four weeks following Christmas or Easter see the most transformation.

### **2. Form Small Groups on the Book**

One of the most powerful ways to maximize your parish's experience with the Book Program is to host a small group study on the book. Each session of your small group experience will inspire your parishioners to grow deeper in the faith and in community with one another. The more engaged your small groups are with the book, the more it will become part of the life of the parish. We create study guides just for this purpose for nearly all of our Book Program books. You can see the full list of study guides [here](#).

## FOLLOWING UP (CONTINUED)

### **3. Teach Your Parishioners How to Evangelize**

Encourage your parishioners to think about the people in their life they'd like to share the book with. Whether your parish has extra copies to give away or your parishioners have finished reading their copy, sharing the book is a simple and effective way to spread the faith and invite people back to the Church. In our research, an astounding 99.4% of Catholics said they had never been taught how to evangelize! And there lies the power of a great book. It taps into a natural, safe, entry point to sharing the faith. You don't have to be a theological expert to pass on a book. You don't have to explain doctrine or defend against criticism. You can simply offer the book to a friend or fellow parishioner and say, "Merry Christmas, I hope this book serves you powerfully." Books break down the walls of resistance to evangelization.

### **4. Share the Book in Your School**

Imagine if all the students at your school read the book together, talked about it with their families, and grew deeper in their faith! Expand the Book Program beyond Christmas and Easter Mass and share the book with your parish school—including parents, teachers, and staff!

## SOW GENEROUSLY

It's hard to believe that something as simple as the right book at the right time can make all the difference in a person's spiritual life. But it can. We've seen it happen.

Handing out books is an exercise in sowing seeds. That means we don't really know where they will fall on fertile soil and where they will fall on deaf ears. But we trust that God will help us place some of them in the hands of the right person at the right time. And God hasn't let us down yet. We can't wait to see who God will transform in your parish this year. Something wonderful is about to happen!



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