

Pride Festival Booth Hospitality - “Best Practices”

What follows is an overview of ways to be intentional about your presence at events commonly known as Pride Festivals, aka “PrideFest,” or “Gay Pride” events. These practices can also be applied at things like community college fairs on campuses, your diocesan conventions, local park celebrations, or other community gatherings where you are invited to represent your church and LGBTQIA+ welcome to others. Your presence can be as large or as small as you make it; two friendly folks in folding chairs handing out a leaflet in front of a small sign, or a giant multi-tabled affair under a 20-foot-high balloon arch. Whatever you can do, your message of God’s love for all, and our journey together to care for one another, needs to be clear. How you interact with organizers and care for those you meet will send messages about who you are and how much of a priority this opportunity for evangelism is to your community.

Planning your Booth - Set-Up Basics

Find someone to join your planning team familiar with similar festivals or expos, or look at images of booths and convention displays online. Notice what catches your attention, and why. Pay attention to the optics of colors, signs, and the readability of things from far-away. Note the difference between monochromatic displays with particular points of interest, and wildly chaotic colorful shows that also can be welcoming and informative, but in a different way. There are lots of great ideas out there to get your creative juices flowing.

The event organizers usually have guidelines about the furnishings, arrangements, and the materials you are allowed to hand out, especially when it comes to food and beverages. Pay attention to those, and be respectful. Verify whether electricity is available in case you wish to play music or videos, or to host a phone charging station for visitors. Sometimes there are extra charges for things like tables, tablecloths, and chairs. If allowed, bring portable camp-style (less likely to sink in the grass) bar height stools. They are a much a friendlier height for visiting.

If you want it to be a place visitors can enter, which is especially welcoming on a day when people would appreciate the shade, put your tables along the back edges of the booth. If the setup is more like a convention, where people pass table-after-table scooping up swag and literature, it’s still nice to have a way for them to step into your welcoming space. Maybe turn a table sideways and have something interesting on the ground like a rug, arrows with fun words, or a temporarily painted logo. Whether the event is inside or out will dictate some of the possibilities here.

Invite congregations who bring and carry banners and flags in the parade to bring them to the festival. Secure ways to display these across the back wall of the booth, or along the front of your tables, or even arched high over your display. If they are in stands or on poles that can be secured in the grass, they can also be placed just outside of the booth to draw people in.

Be ready for weather events, and have tubs with lids for your printed materials, plastic sheets to cover displays if necessary, rainbow-painted rocks to keep things from being blown away, umbrellas and sunblock for volunteers, etc.. Also know where to find emergency exits and shelters.

Booth Environmental Considerations:

Having some sort of event at the booth is also fun and engaging. In one parish the knitter’s group donated lap blankets with loving, welcoming notes attached to them, which were raffled-off (free tickets!) at the top of every hour. Or a spinning wheel with prizes, etc.

Play a video or slideshow – something like “Voices of Witness - Out of the Box” on a large screen, with excellent audio, with chairs, in the shade.

Offer something unique – cute photo booths with “Love Is Love” written on an arch (also featuring the Episcopal shield/qr code) , and wedding “props” – veils, top hats, bow ties, rainbow boas, stuffed puppies, etc for people to snap couples-pics in the booth. Water bottles – also good. As a popular distiller says ... “The people are thirsty.”

Be organized – no clutter. Have nice matching solid-colored tablecloths. Display your parade banners after the parade so they will recognize you. On the tables: flat things in front, tall things in back. All items separated and orderly.

Ask communications folks in each participating parish to promote the booth on their social media platforms, with live updates.

Swag & Literature for Distribution:

Many people on your planning team will share ideas they think are both fun, and practical. Your budget will dictate the quality and quantity of items you will give away. Be sure to have them personalized with welcoming messages. This can be done by ordering items with custom designs, or by creating stickers/labels/iron-on transfers with your message that you apply to generic give-aways. Depending on the size of your festival, you might need anywhere from 500 – 2,000 pieces of each item you decide to distribute. If there is a parade as well, and you plan on distributing things along the route, be sure to have some of the same items at your booth so people will recognize you. If you have enough variety, it’s okay to run out of some things, and to have some overages. If you don’t put dates on them, you can use them next time.

It’s a good idea to ask local vendors, and even places like Church Insurance and the National Church/CPG if they have any giveaways they could ship (paying shipping is cheaper than buying swag).

Each congregation needs to take care when printing literature, brochures, stickers, temporary tattoos etc for distribution. Obviously everything needs to be invitational, LGBTQ+ friendly, and contain good information. Don’t pile everything you have on the tables all at once, but have a handful of each and replenish them throughout the festival from storage tucked beneath the table, out of sight.

Volunteers:

When people offer to “help at Pride” be ready to give them specific ways to do so. Ask them to sponsor your presence there (for swag, booth supplies, whatever is needed). To volunteer a shift at the booth, or help with planning, securing literature, inviting others to participate, take and share pictures on social media, bring water, offer rides – there are lots of ways to help. Put those roles on your sign-up sheets, along with your booth shifts. Each responsibility and shift needs to be clearly defined, with contact information in case people have questions. This includes things like setting-up before the festival officially opens, keeping the booth organized, shutting-down and securing things at the end of each day, then agreeing to close-down and take everyone’s things away when it ends – these are different kinds of shifts, in addition to simply being booth hosts and greeters. See more about booth organization and greeters in this report.

Train Booth Hosts and Greeters

Again, most of this is common sense, but remind people to smile and make eye contact with attendees, even with a nice greeting “Good morning” when they appear and “Thanks for stopping by!” or “Happy Pride!” as they leave.

Be enthusiastic, confident, and polite

Say your prayers. Know the elevator speech. Use the three-part basic Affirmation of Welcome: We believe God loves and created everyone. However, there are many voices claiming to know better, who are saying otherwise. Therefore, we decided to come here and do our best to amplify the message of God's love for all.

Know the resources & literature on the table and be able to reference them. What do you have for parents? Do any of your churches have a teen support group? Do you have anything about what the bible says about this? Which of your congregations is welcoming, and where are they? Do you have anyone I can talk to or pray with? (yes, these are actual PrideFest questions) Have enough volunteers to greet everyone as they cruise past the booth.

Be mindful of your attire. Pride positive. Allies need to know their place. There are good resources about ally etiquette at these events.

Speaking with guests is more important than with fellow booth-jockeys. Be mindful of pausing conversations to greet people. (don't sit in the greeting area eating meals)

Understand, as basically as possible, the distinctions between the Episcopal churches represented at the festival. Even in broad strokes e.g. St. Greg's is large and active and enjoys a strong presence as a cornerstone in this community. St. Lindsey's is known for its music and outreach. The Cathedral is the seat of the Bishop and a gorgeous space. St. Herbert's is Anglo-Catholic. Etc. So everyone will have positive, distinctive, and accurate things to say about each other.

Be joyful.

People often say they only talk to people about their faith or church if they are asked. Every single person who approaches your booth is looking for something. Maybe just water. Maybe acceptance. Maybe to yell at you about something terrible some other religious person or institution did. Hold that space. Love them. Show genuine empathy and welcome, and if necessary, apologize for the harm done. We're all still learning and growing, and genuinely mean to be the people God calls us to be, without fear.

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