

Making a Show Ensuring an Effective Christian Presence at County Shows and Similar Events

Written by Gordon Banks & Betty Jones

A Rural Evangelism Network Resource

Section A - Introduction

The Rural Evangelism Network draws together representatives from national Churches with rural presence and missional organisations that focus on rural evangelism. Members share their knowledge and experience to promote best practise in rural mission.

On the website at www.ruralevangelism.net you will find an “Ideas Exchange” with various topics grouped together. This paper is the text of a downloadable booklet you can find there. Since it was written some aspects have changed. For example, the CRB certificate is now known as DBS certificate. You will also find some incomplete sections towards the end. But the headings for those few sections will provide some guidance.

The Church meets the Marketplace at events such as County Shows. Every County Show is different, dates vary, and size, location and length are not always the same. But all provide a unique opportunity for the Church to be there, engaged and distinctive, salt and light. Major Betty Jones (Salvation Army) and Captain Gordon Banks (Church Army) have a wide experience of Shows. They have pooled their ideas and suggestions into a series of numbered points under several headings which it is hoped will be of help.

If you have a good idea or knowledge you can share please let them know as they recognise there are gaps even in their experience!

Betty Jones – cynogjones@aol.com

Gordon Banks – gordon.banks@diochi.org.uk

Section B - index

Topic	Where to find it
Attractions	C14
Animals	C15
Basics	C
Budget	E
Children's Craft	C13
Child Protection	C17; F13; J3
CRB	J3
Chaplains	C7
Caravans	C20
Cars	F16
Churches Together	C6; E2; F8
DBS Certificates	J3
Duty Ministers	C7
Dogs	F2
Displays	C1; D; F3; H12
Ecumenical	C1; H1
Evangelism	C16
Food	C11
Fire	J
Finance	E
Flowers	F3
Games	C7
Health and Safety	C17; F13; F15; J2 I, J, K
Insurance	F15
Infrastructure	F
Ladders	F15
Marquees	D; E; F14
Music	F6
Outpost	D
Passes	
Play, Parachute	F14
Portfolio	F4; I3
Prayer	C1; F14
Prayer Tent	C16; F14
Refreshments	C7; E
Sun	F10
Showground	C1; F11
Show Committee	C8
Stall holders	C21; F11
Staff Room	
Schools	C23
Tents	E
Teams	C2
Transport	F16; H3
Training	C2
Vans	F16
Water	C17; F2
Worship	Ci8

Section C – An Overview

1. Ideally a representative group or committee should be responsible for the Church Tent and outreach across the Showground. When setting up an Executive or Planning Group it is important to try and make this as ecumenically representative as possible. It is always advisable to allow as much time as possible to plan and prepare. Aim to set up a regular tent committee meeting every two months and then more frequently as the Show approaches. It makes sense if areas of responsibility are shared and agreed upon. For example, chairman, treasurer, minute secretary, site management, displays, chaplaincy, prayer and worship, literature, publications plus publicity, etc. One of these should be appointed to liaise with the Show Ground Committee, usually the site manager. All those going to be involved in the Show should meet at least a month beforehand to check up on how things are shaping up. The Committee should carry out a sensible risk analysis in the planning stage.

2. Usually the Church tent will be large enough to house various elements running at the same time. Volunteers will be needed to cover all of these and to supplement the Committee members, making one team. Run at least one training session to help everyone to make the most out of the church presence at the Show. Topics covered would include engaging in conversations, working as a team, sharing the faith, etc. At the very least team members should be asked to consider what creates a sense of good service in shops, pubs and restaurants. What helps them and makes them feel at ease and comfortable and that they are valued? These same principles should be applied to guests who come to the Church Tent.

3. Where several churches/organisations work together in a Church Tent an executive group or designated site manager should have the final say on how much space/tables each organisation is allowed and ideally should draw up a site plan beforehand. It is not uncommon for people to think they have a right to more space and tables than is possible!

4. Setting an overall theme can prove very useful and help to give a co-ordinated feel to a Church Tent rather than it being a mere jumble of various organisations. Most County Shows have a theme for the year and it may be helpful to link in with that. Alternatively, there may be an 'International Year of...' or some other topical theme. For example, 'International Year of the Child 2009'.

5. While the Church Tent needs to blend in with the rest of the Show it should still be distinctive. People should be able to see that this is the Churches Together and feel comfortable visiting it. The atmosphere should be welcoming in an easy and non-threatening manner so those who do visit the Tent do not go away feeling 'got at' under the guise of being offered a cup of tea/coffee.

6. Churches Together – people are aware of the different denominations and are sometimes confused and puzzled by them. It is worth making every effort to ensure that the Church Tent and its ministry is as representative of the churches working together as possible. Be aware, however, that there may be Christian groups who would want to distance themselves from an official Churches Together Tent and may set up at a Show independently. Should this happen continue to keep open channels of communication with them and seek to allay their concerns with love and grace. There may also be non-orthodox ‘Christian’ groups there or other faith groups. An agreed plan of approach is the wisest policy. Try not to get into arguments, but use love and courtesy.

7. Often the Church Tent will provide official Chaplains (or Duty Ministers) as part of the wider team. Chaplains/Duty Ministers are available to talk with people both in the Church Tent and across the Showground. These should be people already appropriately trained and competent for this work, such as local clergy. Of course other team members might engage in conversations with visitors. Any team member engaged in conversation and finding himself or herself getting out of their depth should refer on to a Chaplain/Duty Minister. Of course everyone is an important part of the one team helping one another, whether a Chaplain, or someone serving refreshments, arranging floral displays, looking after games, or who offer general help in running the Church Tent.

8. Abide by the rules of the Show Committee which may restrict certain activities. For example, giving balloons is now banned at most Shows as is the distribution of leaflets beyond a certain distance from the Church Tent. It may be frustrating, but live with it and show good grace.

9. Agreeing a simple mission statement will help clarify why the church should be present at a Show. The Royal Cornwall Show Tent Committee has, as its mission statement, “to remind people of a past Christian inheritance, to display current engagement and to offer real hope for the future”.

10. The day before the Show deliver a small flyer to all the other stands if at all possible. The flyer should give basic, brief and relevant details about where the Church Tent is situated, and some idea about what is on offer, for example free refreshments and a place to relax. This gives invaluable opportunity for contact with stallholders; however, do be aware of how busy they may be and the pressure of time they may be under to get ready for the next day.

11. Consider putting on a ‘special tea’ for a particular group at the Show, the Show Committee for example.

12. If taking photographs be aware of issues around taking pictures of children. It is good practice always to ask permission and to post a notice asking to be notified if someone objects.

13. There is a difference between a Church Tent at a County Show and a Church Fete! The primary role at Shows is not to make money. Refreshments might be offered on a “suggested donation” basis or offered free. The same applies to games, Bouncy Castle and similar. But check out whether anyone else at the Show has a similar activity for which they are making a charge. Take care not to undermine their venture by your generosity. A provision could be given for donations. Of course books for sale and other items from Fairtrade for example are a direct sale with related cost. Avoid the white elephant stall and things like tombola and raffles! It is vital that personnel are not overstretched and that only what can be managed and controlled is attempted. For example, at least two people dedicated to look after something like a bouncy castle will be needed. Some hirers of such equipment also provide staff.

14. Try to arrange for something that will arrest attention as people pass by. This should be immediately outside the tent unless the weather or Show laws prevent this. For example, you might be able to invite the Mission Aviation Fellowship with their Cessna plane, or a local Chapter of Christian Bikers. A number of charities and organisations have dedicated and liveried buses. Try to draw in local talent but do not get stuck in a rut by having the same people year on year, ring the changes. For example, a clown one year, a conjuror the next, and face painting another year. Garden games work very well as a way of breaking the ice, allowing space to play and giving opportunity for conversations. All team members need to know how to work such games and use them as a way of engaging with people. Games equipment should not be deposited without someone ready to work them.

15. Some Church Tents take advantage of local Christian farmers to arrange for some petting animals. But be aware of Health & Safety rules that must be complied with, for example where the animals are sited in relation to the refreshments, the availability of hand wipes or spray, etc.

16. Avoid aggressive evangelism. There should always be opportunity for people to ask questions, or ask for prayer. Consider creating a prayer area within the Tent and ensure that appropriate free literature is visibly available for any who might like to help themselves.

17. Age balance – People of various ages are likely to visit the Tent so it is always good to have various age groups represented on the team. The Church Tent offers an opportunity for all ages to be involved. Ensure that the team is aware of Child Protection issues, Health and Safety matters especially where there is hot water or drinks involved. Create a policy document well before the event and ensure that everyone on the team has a copy, and that you cover this in your training days.

18. Structured Worship/Prayers – Ideally hold these at specific, well-advertised times during the day, perhaps at the start and finish of the day and lunch time as well. Alternatively, short prayers might be offered on the hour every hour. Any prayer requests left in the “prayer area” could be used, or prayer could focus on various displays or activities in the Church Tent. Some Church Tents put a tear-off notepad or “Post-it” type notes on each

table on which people can write their prayer requests. These are then included in the formal devotional times. Try to keep these occasions simple. If they take place in the main area of the Tent be aware that some things may still be happening so it may not be easy to gain total silence and attention from everyone! Team members could volunteer to share in the times of prayer or be allocated specific slots in advance. It is good if someone is given responsibility for the times of prayer. Do not apologise when announcing a time of prayer but be gracious. Try to demonstrate the worth of such times.

19. Some larger Shows have an official opening act of worship on the night before the Show opens. It is worth working towards this if it is not already part of the set up. It may be possible to arrange for all the Chaplains to be 'commissioned' at any opening act of worship. At some Shows the Show Committee give membership tickets to the Chaplains because they value their ministry. Sometimes these acts of worship can become turgid and dull, so try to keep them lively and make use, if possible, of local talent- a local band, school choir, group, etc. Both the Devon County and Royal Cornwall Show follow this act of worship with a reception back at the Church Tent (with the bishop providing a barrel of beer!). This all helps the Church Tent feel lived in and ensures that by the night before the Show opens the tent is ready.

20. Try to arrange for someone to stay on site. You may be able to get permission to site a caravan as part of your pitch as at the Suffolk Show. Or it might be that someone camps out in the marquee. This is one way you can offer 24/7 chaplaincy cover during the whole time.

21. Chaplaincy Rotas. During show days it is a good pattern to have at least one Chaplain inside the tent and one or more out on the Showground visiting other tents and stands. The Chaplains need to be clearly and easily identified and it is good if clergy wear clerical collars or other means of identification. Try and ensure you have as much cover as you can without overstressing people, perhaps setting times for Chaplains to be on duty, maybe at 1 or 2 hour blocks of time. It might be good to determine specific areas of the Showground for Chaplains to move around at different times so that all areas and stall holders get a visit. This also enables good relationships to be built up with other exhibitors. If Chaplains who have served in previous years are allocated the same area as before this can give them an opportunity to further develop a relationship with stall holders year on year. Chaplains' rotas need to be posted so everyone knows who is on duty and where. This could list mobile phone numbers or use two-way radio links with Chaplains working away from the Tent for emergency contact. An alternative, or supplement to using Chaplains is a 'ministry team' that could be responsible for the prayers (whilst getting others to contribute), be available, perhaps even prayer walking the site and giving prayer cover before, during and after the Show.

22. Children – try to have something on offer that is appropriate for different ages, but do not offer to run a crèche unless it is very clear what is being taken on. Garden games work well with children. If there is the space put up another gazebo inside the Church Tent with a play parachute to make a dedicated children's area. If possible, find some old but decent

carpet to put down. Babies and toddlers get fed up with being stuck in strollers all day and welcome a bit of space where they can safely crawl around for a while.

Sometimes a church tent can be used as a place where people can meet up if they get separated while walking around. If you find yourself with a 'lost child' please take care regarding any announcements. If police are on site, then refer the matter to them. Check with organiser guidelines.

23. Schools usually visit the Shows on certain days (most often in a three- day show this will be on the Friday). Is it possible to work with the schools in producing some kind of display? For example, linking in with the theme they could write prayers and draw pictures for the Church Tent. When they come to visit they will be pleased to see their work on public display. And do remember that children and young people like to collect Goody Bags filled with small items and literature (no balloons) and stickers.

24. Refreshments – can form the backbone to any Church Tent but can also become the one dominant feature. It is important to think through why they are being offered. Health and Safety is very important and it is vital to keep in step with the latest legislation. For example, it is not permissible to offer anything beyond wrapped biscuits. It may be possible to have a spray hand wash available for guests before they have their refreshments. Try to use real cups and saucers and maybe mugs. Ensure fair-traded goods are used and advertise them. Because of legislation a fixed charge cannot be made but donations can be accepted. Thus be aware of security and if possible arrange for some on-site banking. Think about washing up, tea towels and the myriad of other items that will be needed. It is easy to slip into type here so why not ask a group of men to take on this task! A dedicated person with responsibility to oversee this area is crucial. A pattern that has developed at the South of England and Royal Norfolk Shows is that one or more churches takes on the responsibility for a day or half day. They sort out who is coming, how they will get there and some very often make it a kind of church day out.

25. If you have the space you might want to offer a 'left items' facility, but well signed as at their owners' risk. You can buy very simple large strong plastic shelving from DIY stores. Put it in a secure place and maybe offer a simple raffle ticket with a duplicated number.

Section D - Outposts

It might be more appropriate for some elements to be located elsewhere on the Showground rather than in the Church tent - or in both places. So, for example, at the Royal Cornwall Show the FLAME (Family Life & Marriage Education) committee and Mothers' Union set up a 'Getting Married in Church' display in the Wedding Marquee. A group like the Farming Community Network might be better placed in the Farmers Marquee. If this is done, try and make links and connections with leaflets directing people from one place to the other. Some people from such groups moving between the two places can also be beneficial.

Section E - Funding

Budget –this is a most important consideration. A small Church Tent in a big three-day Show will look pathetic, but a marquee and ancillary equipment does not come cheap and it will be necessary need to be thinking in terms of thousands of pounds rather than loose change. But conversely putting a lot of money into a one-day Show may not be the best use of resources. Tents can be hired but check what the hire cost covers. Always talk to the Show organisers who may be sympathetic to what you are offering. If correctly presented and fully backed it may be that the local Churches Together Group will offer some funding. Other individual denominations may have access to other funds they could draw upon. Ensure any monies are secure. Make sure people know what they are giving to if donations are invited for refreshments or to offset cost. Ensure total transparency on all transactions and always ensure receipts and invoices are kept for any reimbursements. Consider ‘posting’ an outline of cost

Section F – Some important issues

1. Church Tent – is it distinctive?
2. Remember the dog bowl – always full of nice clean water.
3. Flowers – it is always good to have something living, but remember that most Shows have a Flower Tent, any flower displays are to be there purely as simple decoration. At the end of the Show it is usually easy to sell them or perhaps distribute them to a ‘worthy cause’ like a local Care Home or helpers.
4. Create a ring binder which will become the definitive Show Portfolio. In there will be written who does what and any key contacts. It is good practice as well as sensible to log any problems or good ideas which invariably arise during the Show but then can be lost in time if not recorded. Therefore, it is good practise to have this Show Portfolio readily available at the Show.
5. Use of modern technology such as showing DVDs presents some problems at Shows. Notable amongst these are damp, security, too much light and limited power source.
6. Music – quiet live music is always best although something more enthusiastic can be offered if only for a short and well announced period (giving people a chance to avoid it). Canned music can be a contentious issue and a clear decision before the Show needs to be made about what is going to be allowed, what type of music and the volume. Try to avoid playing Praise & Worship music all the time. Again think of linking in with the theme. Check out the regulations on playing and performing music. Do you need a licence?
7. Is there an overall theme for the Church Tent or is it looking like a random collection of displays and exhibitions each vying for space?

8. Banners and flags – every Show has them and they work well. So think about a flagpole and a flag that says something about the Church Tent as Churches Together and/or the theme.
9. Bubble machines can be a great attraction but beware of using where there may be a slip danger because of a wet floor.
10. Weather – this is Britain and at any time of year anywhere there can be any kind of weather so try to think of the worse possible scenario for all cases and as much as possible be prepared. This is wise both for the team members and for the Church Tent.
11. Be aware of other stall holders before, during and when breaking camp at the end of the Show. Be ready to offer help (but be aware of their own H&S issues). This might be assisting putting up a gazebo, loaning a mallet or making them a cup of tea/coffee, etc. A lot of stall holders return year on year and it is invaluable to build up a positive relationship with them, asking how things have been in the past twelve months. Also many stall holders travel the season from one Show Ground to another.
12. Is it evident that it is various churches working together?
13. If possible try to obtain a secure place where Show items can be safely stored after the event until needed again. Any money raised at Shows can be fed back into developing Show resources. It might be possible to arrange for some of these items to be loaned out to churches running fetes and fairs, possibly with a small charge to help cover cost of replacement and maintenance. It is even possible that a part-time post could be created for someone to oversee all of this while keeping abreast of the ever changing Health and Safety legislation, child protection and disability issues.
14. Prayer Area – if you have sizeable marquee, a gazebo works very well inside a marquee as a prayer tent. Throw over it a large colourful play parachute for added effect but in this instance obviously no candles! Display suggested topics for prayer, perhaps picking up the theme. Prayer requests can be written on cards or sticky notes and put up on a board. Private prayers can be placed in a sealed box with assurance that they will be destroyed at the end of the day, as their prayer is between them and God. It is also good to offer a way of praying outside the tent, a net or tree on which people can tie a ribbon, or stones can be laid at the foot of a cross or in water – these are just some ways in which people can offer a prayer and move on.
15. Health and Safety issues must be a priority. It is good if one person is appointed to oversee this from the setting up, during the Show days and including breaking camp. When setting up people have a nasty habit of climbing unsuitable ladders and doing daft and dangerous things! Make sure you have insurance cover.
16. Most Church Tents at Shows will have a huge amount of ‘stuff’ to take to set up and dress the tent and it may be necessary to think about getting a van to transport items rather than ruin someone’s car!

Section G – general literature and publicity material

1. Try to ensure that there is not a huge amount of varying literature, especially concerning anything that is for use in encouraging people to consider faith issues. Try to establish continuity of such material, possibly linked in with the overall theme or choose one or two “contemporary” issues such as World Cup, events similar to Slavery 2007, or Olympics.
2. ReJesus (www.rejesus.co.uk) and Christian Enquiry Agency have good topical and relevant resources and are recognised by all mainline Churches.
3. Publicity – try and get a place in the Show Catalogue. Draw up posters/flyers for distribution. (but be aware some Shows restrict the distance from pitch distribution can be made)

Section H – displays within the Church Tent

1. Try to ensure that the displays are ecumenical or have a balance so that no one denomination, unless previously agreed upon, dominates.
2. The displays that are going to be mounted should be the decision of the Committee or an Executive Group, and being there one year should not set a precedent for a particular group or organisation always having a presence at future Shows unless it is something directly akin to rural issues, like Farming Community Network.
3. All literature or other items brought by an organisation is the responsibility of that organisation and therefore they must transport them home, make other suitable arrangements or be willing to lose them!
4. Interactive displays usually work better, think of quizzes, things to do or see or hear, taste or touch.

Section I – Development and borrowing ideas

1. Don't overstretch yourself, do what is manageable and allow this to grow but remember Shows are annual events and so any development can take a long time.
2. It is important to look and learn whilst walking around the Show. Think out of the box and always be thinking if there is a gap in what is being done or something that is not being covered. Are there other good ideas about displays or exhibitions that can be picked up?
3. Make sure any ideas or items that are in need of replacement or repair are logged in the Show's Portfolio.

Section J – Legal and best practise

Elements in this subject are prone to change regularly and are subject to statutory regulations. At the date of publication, it is intended to produce supplementary information on our website at www.ruralevangelism.net under the “Ideas Exchange” section. Organisers of shows are strongly encouraged to ensure that the aspects listed below have been fully considered and appropriate action taken.

J1 – Risk assessments

J2 – Health and safety

J3 – Child protection and DBS (previously CRB) certification

J4 – Insurance