

A Case Study for Strategic Communication

*Prayer, planning and promotion of
'Night of Praise and Worship'*

A Quick Bite Publication
Scott Vaughan Communications, LLC



A Promotion Case Study

A Case Study, by definition, is a descriptive analysis of a person, group or event. It's a story. So, this month, I'm departing from the usual essay format to simply tell you a story. It's a story of how prayer, planning and promotion came together to launch a church's very special worship experience on a Sunday evening.

Making this even more special to me, personally, is that the profiled church is Lexington Baptist Church in Lexington, SC, where my family has been served and has served for more than 20 years.

Project Overview

Constituted in 1893, Lexington Baptist Church (lexingtonbaptist.org) is a traditional, Southern Baptist, Deep South, main street church in Lexington, SC, but with a clear movement into 21st Century church culture. The street-front church buildings are traditional with a big worship center and a steeple, including a historic traditional chapel building along the town's Main Street. The worship, education and missions strategies would reflect, in part or whole, other progressive Southern Baptist, Deep South, Main Street churches of its size and history.

Mike Turner has served as senior pastor of Lexington Baptist Church since late 2007. For the sake of full disclosure, Mike is my friend *and* my pastor. He and I share the same college Alma mater (University of Georgia), our home towns are on opposite ends of the same city (Atlanta), and I was secretary of the search team that sought God's will to call Mike as our pastor.

In my more than 20 years as a member of Lexington Baptist Church, I've served in vocational communication ministry for more than 17 of those years. Until recently, I had never served the communication needs of my own church. This has been a purposeful decision, allowing me to attend, worship and lead within my own church in ways that don't intersect my vocational ministry. Within my church, I am an adult Bible Study leader, an ordained deacon, a committee chairman, and a member of the laity. In 2011, the church ordained me to the ministry, but I consider myself very attached to the church laity.

In August 2012, Mike asked me to step in and help coach the church's communication ministry. That led to eight months as the church's interim communication director. During that time, on a limited basis, I managed the church's overall communication ministry. With the help of the church staff and contract service providers, we were able to simplify and streamline the church's communication work in preparation for a new communication director. The church's Personnel Committee, upon recommendation from Mike, restructured the communication area of work to include (beyond methodology and message management) database management and front-end customer service. The director's position was upgraded to be one of five key staff team leaders, who report directly to Mike. That was a brilliant decision.

Each week, the church staff gathers for a Tuesday afternoon staff meeting. On Wednesday afternoons, those involved in the weekly worship coordination gather for a separate meeting. During the winter months, at one of these worship meetings, Mike shared his heart for a Sunday evening worship service that would bring together the church's traditional / blended worship with the church's contemporary worship. This

unified service, as Mike communicated, would truly integrate the various worship styles of the church, and more importantly bring together worshippers who were experiencing a silo around a particular worship style. Mike was careful to point out that he did not want a talent show or a musical review, highlighting one-by-one the church's different musical groups, choirs and ensembles. The vision was for the musical styles to actually come together. Picture, if you will, a senior adult member of the sanctuary choir singing with the worship leader of the contemporary band, and more than a dozen students singing with the sanctuary choir, and worship numbers – traditional and contemporary – supported by the contemporary band, the sanctuary orchestra, and the choir. And, every number would involve congregational singing.

Mike's vision was a worship service never before attempted by our church.

As the church's worship team, which included me as interim communication director, continued, it became very important that this worship service include video testimonies from people in the pew and that these testimonies come from people not necessarily recognized by the church body. Often, when we look for testimonies, we turn to the usual suspects, and there are lots of testimonials of God's grace occurring within the lives of those lesser known to the majority of the church family. Also, the worship team determined that it was important for Mike to present the gospel at some point during the service, but not in a lengthy sermon. And, as with Baptist life, the five-minute gospel presentation would include a time for individual response privately or publicly.

The date and time of Sunday, April 21, 2013 at 6 p.m. was selected for the service. And, the name of the service would be simple: "Night of Praise and Worship." The selected date provided a communication challenge. In 2013, Easter was celebrated on Sunday, March 31. The week following Easter, in 2013, was the traditional Spring Break for public and many private schools in our community. In most churches, including Lexington Baptist Church, the weeks preceding Easter are dominated by Easter-related worship, programming and events. Easter represents a large promotion wall, blocking activities and events occurring immediately following Easter. Christmas has the same effect on January events and activities. These two big holidays are promotion walls that block out what we do for a few weeks afterward. Spring Break posed a second real problem. In the South, Spring Break has become a forced vacation for church staff and church work. People just aren't listening during Spring Break. As Spring Break concluded on Sunday, April 7, only two weeks remained for promotion of the April 21 date.

Further complicating promotion of this worship event was the decision to use Sunday evening. Lexington Baptist Church averages, on any given Sunday, about 1,300 in Sunday morning worship over four services. While the church offers a weekly Sunday evening service, attendance averages less than 200. The challenge for the Night of Praise and Worship was to move people to attend on a Sunday night when they weren't conditioned to do so.

Why make it difficult? You may be wondering, why have the event in April and so close to Easter Sunday and the following Spring Break? Why did Mike lead us to have the service on a Sunday evening when people are not conditioned to return to the church property? To best answer that question, we turn to the prayer culture at Lexington Baptist Church.

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Planning, Prayer and Promotion

Prior to Mike's call to Lexington Baptist Church, pastor Rick Fisher and his wife, Debbie, promoted a deep praying culture throughout Lexington Baptist Church. A very intentional, yet confidential, intercessory prayer ministry was established. The prayer ministry continues to have its own private prayer room with trained lay prayer partners coming to the room to pray over requests received. It is a model for prayer ministry. As testimony to Rick's leadership in prayer ministry, when Rick moved on to God's next chapter for him, the pastoral search team spent almost two months gathering and praying for God's will before ever discussing the pastoral vacancy.

No one was surprised, then, when God sent Mike as the church's pastor. No one was surprised when we learned that prayer is an integral part of Mike's own life. In fact, Mike wrote his doctoral thesis on prayer. Mike is a praying pastor, attends prayer gatherings among the laity, has Sunday morning prayer partners praying over the services, and meets monthly with a small group of men who specifically pray for one another and the church. It is not unusual to wake to read a prayer Mike has posted on his Facebook profile.

According to Mike, he and Dan Williams, the church's associate pastor of worship, began 2013 with a committed 40 days of prayer regarding worship at Lexington Baptist Church. The two only met once or twice together, but remained faithful to pray daily and communicate about it. Through those prayers, God provided the vision for Night of Praise and Worship.

In the selection of a date and time, these are my observations: At the morning worship service on Labor Day weekend 2012, Mike gave the congregation a snapshot of this blending of worship styles. It was very well received. As Mike and Dan prayed, and God revealed a vision for Night of Praise and Worship, Mike did not want to wait until fall 2013 for the service. With an early Easter, the best time with the least calendar clutter was in mid- to late April 2013. As for the selection of Sunday evening, the Sunday morning services on Sunday, April 21 at least gave opportunity for last-minute promotion. And, in Deep South minds, Sunday evening remains a "slow night" for personal work and activity, and a possible opportunity for corporate worship. Plus, the ongoing Sunday evening service did provide a core audience willing to return to the church property.

When planning began for Night of Praise and Worship, prayer was foundational to all the planning meetings. I will insert here, too, that in the days prior to the actual event, Mike, his wife, Pam, and other key prayer leaders in the church walked the church property, specifically praying over the empty spaces and those who God would send to fill them.

Let me point out, too, that this vertical communication with our Lord must precede all effective horizontal communication with others. I am stunned that churches believe they can effectively communicate with others and completely ignore communicating with the God who surveys all. Vertical communication must precede all effective horizontal communication with others. Do I need to write that again? Burn it into your church life.

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I cannot over-emphasize the time set aside for the planning of this event. For more than two months, the worship team of the church met weekly. The service was meticulously planned, musically, yes, but with two video testimonies and the gospel presentation incorporated into the 80-minute program. This was never designed to be a concert, but a participatory congregational worship event.

Planning led to rehearsals that were well-planned. Yes, there were reported rehearsal challenges because of the unique blending of the service, but those challenges were hurdled. Nothing was left to chance.

Key to the planning was my inclusion, as the interim communication director, in those worship planning meetings. As the one charged with promotion – creating an awareness – it was invaluable for me to be a part of the planning process. The name, Night of Praise and Worship, is very generic and does not speak succinctly to audiences. In fact, the name alone could easily apply to any Sunday evening worship service at any church. Being a part of the planning meetings helped me wrap my head around that generic name and begin long-distance strategic thinking about promotion. Also, my participation in the weekly meetings helped me, personally, with my own prayers and spiritual preparation for the strategic promotion.

Promotion

So, let's recap all the obstacles to the success of this project.

- Easter was a big wall preventing audiences from seeing the Night of Praise and Worship event scheduled for Sunday, April 21 at 6 p.m. There was a narrow three-week promotion window between Easter (Sunday, March 31) and Sunday, April 21.
- Public and private schools had their Spring Break the week after Easter, reducing the optimum promotion window to only two weeks.
- The event was planned for a Sunday evening, which is generally attended by only about 10 percent of those attending Sunday morning services. The auditorium used for the event seats about 1,250; the average Sunday evening attendance is less than 150.
- The name of the event, Night of Praise and Worship, was very generic and did not speak to the succinct vision for the evening.



There was one additional problem. The event needed an iconic piece of artwork that could be used consistently in all promotion. Initially, I wanted the artwork of this woman, left. I liked that the light was piercing the dark clouds and that she was completely surrendering herself to the light. You can even see evidence of the wind blowing in her clothing I got four graphic designers involved in trying to find this artwork on the internet. It appears in a lot of blog sites, but a good and scalable version of it was just not available anywhere. Also, I found it used in

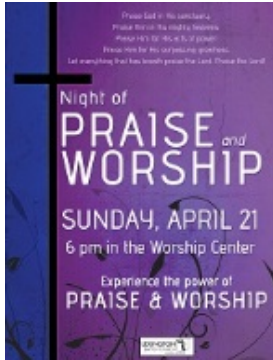
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some blog sites that sent a mixed message and my flinch factor went up. Ultimately, I had to move on from it though I've saved it as the screen image for my iPhone.

The words praise and worship create all kinds of visuals, and many of them can



be cartoonish. Someone suggested artwork of people with raised hands, expressing worship. And, while that captured the worship of a few in our church, the percentage is very small. Finally, a graphic designer came up with something just as generic as the name of the event, but with vibrant colors. And, in hindsight two generics (name and icon) can make a positive. Pictured, left, is a sample of a poster created for the event. This blue and purple artwork with the cross separating the colors became the icon. All the type was fixed



and consistent throughout the promotion. You can't really see it well in this small artwork, but at the bottom of the poster is the church's corporate logo, which I've pictured here.

So, you can see there were some obstacles.

But, there were also some significant strengths. And, I need to recap and add to those.

- I was part of all the planning meetings, including the prayer time at those meetings. That gave me a significant peace about the obstacles. You can't discount the total involvement of the communication director / manager.
- The entire advance planning, prior to Easter, helped me write my own promotion timetable, think strategically about it, and be prepared for an aggressive launch just after Spring Break ended on Sunday, April 7. I was able to be sitting on "ready, set and go" for an aggressive push during those last two weeks.
- Easter worked to our advantage. Staff's high-energy plunge into Easter planning left the month of April relatively distraction-free. I realized that my aggressive two-week push would have no competition from other ministries or activities within the church. This is significant. Far too many church events are cannibalized by other big church events happening at the same time and promoted to the same general audiences. Cannibalization leads to a settling of "good is good enough."
- Another negative turned to a positive when I realized our church's relatively poor turnout on Sunday evening paved the way for something much larger and much different. Had we already had a big worship service on Sunday evening, well, it would have been more difficult to convince audiences that Night of Praise and Worship was indeed something very different.
- Last, Night of Praise and Worship was new. It was new to our church, and if communicated well, new and different can always draw a crowd.

So, let me share some of the promotion strategies and tactics that we used.

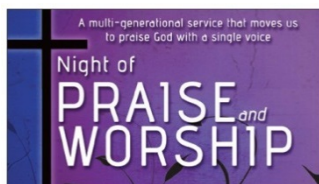
- On Easter Sunday, knowing services would be jammed, we advertised Night of Praise and Worship with a video commercial in all worship services. The video was produced by Jake Powers, who serves as the church's media director. In our planning meetings, we discussed that this video would feature behind-the-scenes looks at the planning meetings and also the rehearsals. We wanted to communicate that this was new and different, that a lot of prayer and energy was going into it, and that the rehearsals were including a true blending of music styles and musicians. Mike was featured in the commercial communicating the vision to the choir. The video introduced the artwork. We replayed the video in worship services on Sundays, April 7 and 14. On Sunday, April 21 – the day of the event – Mike gave a personal push from the pulpit.
- As the video commercial launched the promotion, we added information to our church website and began to hammer the promotion message through our church's Facebook Page. I was careful in describing, including that testimonials and a gospel presentation would be a part of the evening. To my core, I wanted people to know that this was participatory – not just a big music event or concert.
- The April issue of our church newsletter, printed and mailed to all church households, carried the event's artwork and message on the cover. The artwork on the preceding page, in this essay, was the cover of the newsletter. The cover was replicated in large and small posters throughout the church property. Mike used his personal newsletter space to promote the service.
- I included simple promotion, with the artwork, in the church e-newsletter distributed to more than 1,000 households within the church family. That newsletter was delivered on three Wednesdays prior to April 21.
- All of the above was my macro strategy toward getting the message out to a wide and broad audience. And, then we came to Sunday, April 14 – one week prior to the event. In the final week, I went for the home run. I knew that we had one chance at bat, down to our last out in the last inning, down by two with a runner on second. We needed a home run. But, as baseball fans know, when you swing for the fence there's a lot of risk involved. But, friends, communication strategy is all about risk and recovery. With all the prayer going into this event, I just wasn't particularly worried. And, here this message: You do all you can in promotion as professionally and strategically as you can, and then trust God to send who He needs to attend. Write that down; counting heads is the work of Satan because it can lead to discouragement. So, here's what I did during the final week:

1. The church sign along arguably one of the two busiest highways in our town is an old-fashioned letter-box sign. I knew that if we just put “Night of Praise and Worship” on that sign it would feel just like any other service at any other church. No one would notice or care. The name of the service was just too generic for the limited space of the church sign. And, so I went with this:

Heavy burdened?
Join Us!
Sunday, April 21
6 p.m.

Rather than advertise the event, I decided to reach into the pain all of us carry around. I have to believe that those coming to the service with heavy burdens walked away with a measure of peace. It was that kind of service. As you promote, don't get so hung up on the method that you ignore the strategy behind your message.

2. While visiting my parents in mid-March in the Atlanta area, I noticed the ushers handing out small business cards that colorfully promoted the church's Easter Sunday services. I had already planned to have a take-away card that our ushers



could distribute to those attending services on Sunday, April 14. My actual strategy was for ushers to give everyone five of the cards so members and guests could use the cards as invitations. My initial vision was to use a card the size of a Post-it Note. When I saw the business cards used by the Atlanta church, I liked them better. So, using the artwork, I created a business card (pictured, here – front and back) and had 2,500 of them printed. (The total cost was \$150). Now, let's put a pause right here and I'll come back to the cards.

3. More than 70 percent of churches, from my national research, *do not* promote through small groups within the church. Small groups can include traditional Sunday School classes, groups that meet in homes, women's ministry, men's ministry and senior adult ministry. For the purpose of this discussion, a small group is any smaller cluster of members within the larger church body. It's foolish that churches don't promote through these groups. Within each group there are one or more influencers, who can move people to action on behalf of the larger church. I teach an adult Bible Study class. If I stand before that group and endorse something the church is doing, yes, people are moved to participate. Success is all about getting buy-in and endorsement from those who influence others within the church's various network circles. So, with the help of office

staff, I built a database of these lay leaders, and began – after Easter – asking Mike to send the group an e-mail, personally, asking for the endorsement and support of Night of Praise and Worship. Trickle-down promotion. ☺ I also organized a meeting between adult Sunday School teachers and Mike on Palm Sunday afternoon (March 23). Mike personally briefed the leaders on the Night of Praise and Worship, gaining their group and individual endorsement.

4. Now, back to the business cards. On any given Sunday, we have between 1,200 and 1,350 attending traditional Sunday School classes. A healthy percentage of these are in adult classes. Through Mike's e-mails and the Palm Sunday meeting, this group of potential endorsers was primed to help promote the April 21 event. So, On Wednesday, April 10, I sent this group an e-mail. The e-mail announced that the business cards would be available in their classrooms, and we hoped members would take them and use them as personal invitations to the April 21 event. On Friday, April 12, my Vicki and I went classroom-to-classroom, leaving a stack of the cards in each room with a flyer that reminded teachers to distribute the cards. Some will wonder, 'Scott, that was cutting it close, waiting until one week away to distribute the cards.' But, that was intentional strategy. I know that people are always waiting until the last minute to commit, whether it's giving an invitation or attending an event. And, so I wanted the cards distributed at the last possible moment, but with a week to circulate. You may ask, 'What if they didn't get picked up in the classrooms?' Big deal. I wanted them to be picked up and circulated, but if nothing else the presence of the cards pushed discussion among the people in the room. And, discussion is promotion. In strategic communication, the promotion value isn't always limited to the most obvious purpose.
5. In that final week, I send one more congregational e-mail advertising the event. I encouraged our people to forward the e-mail to others as a personal invitation. It was intentionally sent out on Tuesday morning, April 16.
6. On Friday, April 19, I created a Facebook event page, and invited all of my friends from church and within our community. I was fascinated how viral the event page went through our church family. You can't read too much into whether people say they are attending or not attending through these event pages. In the same way people promise two candidates in the same election that one will have a vote over the other, people lie through Facebook. ☺ Again, the use of Facebook was promotion of the artwork and the message: "unlike anything we've done, creative worship, testimonials and gospel presentation." (A word about Facebook. I did not purchase an advertisement for Night of Praise and Worship through Facebook. I would recommend purchasing advertisements for local church events because you can target Facebook users within a specific community. Also, Facebook has added "post boosting," which is another form of paid advertisement for specific page posts. I would certainly spend money to test-drive Facebook advertising and post boosting for future church events).

7. On Sunday morning, April 21, Mike promoted the event from the pulpit with the artwork on screens behind him.
8. On Sunday afternoon, April 21, at 3 p.m., I sent one last e-mail advertisement to our congregation. Was this overkill? No. I know how people are about last minute decisions. And, I know that someone may have been worried sick over what they faced on Monday morning, and needed a push toward worship on Sunday evening. Also, I know that more than 50 percent of our culture has smart telephones with capability to receive e-mail on those phones. So, I know those with smart telephones – and others, too – received that last-minute e-mail. I am confident it moved some people to attend.

I know that in that final week, we pounded the audience with consistent message and artwork every 2-3 days. I would not ever recommend that to be a general best practice, but strategy is never clean, pretty and approached with a template mindset. The audience, message, method and timing dictated the strategic approach to communication.

A Night of Praise and Worship



My family lives within two miles of the church property. So, there's rarely a need to rush to anything at our church. But, on Sunday, April 21, I told Vicki that we should

probably go to the church property about 5:30 p.m. I had a hunch there was going to be a crowd attending this service. I wanted to watch them pour in.



As we approached the church, I realized the parking lots were already filling.

Our estimation is that 1,000 people attended the event. Losing seats for stage extension and the additional sound system, the worship center was easily at 90 percent of capacity. I saw people come together who normally are divided on Sundays among four separate services. I saw a lot of people I did not know. All of the generational age demographics were well represented. A friend

of mine in another section of the worship center said he was in the company of a large group from the community – unattached to our church.

The service was, indeed, unlike anything we have ever done or seen in our church. People of all generations and in love with all styles of music came together – standing and sitting as they felt comfortable – worshipping with voices raised and some with hands lifted, too.

I'm not sure how many responded to the gospel presentation – that is between those individuals and our Lord. I know our Information Center, ushers and greeters were in full staff that night, and many had conversations with people about the church, its ministries, and future worship events like this one.

I have often said of church gatherings that the effectiveness can be measured by the people's reluctance to leave. A full half hour after the service concluded, people were still joined in conversation and fellowship in the worship center, the narthex and spilling out onto the small concrete mall in front of the worship center.

While I have surrendered my interim roll with the church to a new communication director, I know conversations are underway to have another similar event in 2013 – perhaps the fall. My only counsel is to shake up the program a little to keep it fresh, and it might be good to change up the name and the artwork just to keep all of that fresh, too. Hanging onto the same artwork, name and program can raise expectations to levels that can't be satisfactorily met.

It was a great night. Many still talk about it – almost a month later. Vicki and I were out to dinner just last week and an enthusiastic church member jumped from her seat, ran across the restaurant, and burst into exclamations over the night.

I know God is glorified by that.

In closing, my advice is the same that I've given for almost 20 years in this vocational ministry of mine: Prayer, planning and promotion all need to work together,

and promotion must be strategic in getting the best message to the best audience by the best method at the best time for measurable action. Then, let God do His work. <^><

Note: Photos of Night of Praise and Worship were taken by Robert Oswald, a member of our church. It's important to capture photographs and video of all your church events for future use. Photographs of this important evening can be used in promotion of future, similar events and as part of our 2013 annual ministry report.

Scott Vaughan was a 20-year newspaper writer, editor and publisher before entering vocational ministry as a church communication strategist. As a member of the media, he won writing and strategic advertising awards in both the Georgia and South Carolina press associations, and served on the South Carolina Press Association's Executive Board. For nine years, he was marketing director for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, serving churches of all sizes, in all cultures, and of all ages. In 2003, he created his own vocational ministry, enabling him to serve a larger ecumenical community that reaches throughout the world. Scott Vaughan Communications exclusively serves the faith community. Scott is a professional public speaker, a local church leader and is active in his community, specifically supporting children and young people through youth sports. He and Vicki have been married 27 years and have four sons, ages 25 to 16.



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