



HOW TO...

inspire your congregation

Tips of how to stir the hearts of your congregation to spread the big idea and move them into action.

why keep inspiring your church?

The vision of seeing churches giving all children a strong start to life is a big one, and you have already grown your own conviction, heard and seen stories of change and you may be more convinced than ever that the various activities you are doing in your church are essential to focus on families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). It is important to remember that this vision and passion might not be something that everyone carries equally. You have a role to keep inspiring people in your congregation.

As with any vision, it takes more than one presentation to win people over and keep them committed to the cause. Vision leaks, and good leaders will find creative ways of keeping the opportunity and passion high in people's minds. There will always be new people visiting your church and they will need to hear the ways in which your church is serving families in this way. Sharing the vision and opportunities also makes families in the First Thousand Days (FTD) at home.

what are you trying to communicate?

There are many ways in which you can communicate with your congregation about families, FTD and ways they can be part of your plans.

In your regular communication with congregants about this topic, you can share with them – how the church is ideally positioned to serve in this space. It may feel like you are repeating yourself, but for many people, it will be new, and they make the connection for the first time. Keep reminding people of the sense of opportunity that exists. You don't want to use imagery of FTD that gives the impression that it is terrible and that nothing can be done.

Use opportunities to [communicate what the church will do and what has been accomplished](#). Giving feedback and testimonies are good ways to keep the vision and passion high. Be sure to **connect your communication with what it means for the congregants** – both as individuals and as the community. When planning your communications, think through why you want them to know this information or opportunity. What do you want them to know? What do you want them to do with the information? If you are communicating about antenatal classes: are you telling them to volunteer? To attend? To financially support it? Thinking through these things often helps to clarify what needs to be said and what can be left out.

When relevant, use language of, **“This is who we are”**. For example, “We are a community of believers who surround and care for families in the First Thousand Days. We get to do something that no other institution can do: love parents in this new season of life”.

are you being a living example?

Connect with families in your own context and space... live out what we are asking churches to do.

connect with families

As a ministry leader, volunteer or pastor you have a part to play in spreading the big idea around the particular needs and opportunities within the First Thousand Day (FTD). One of your roles is to mobilise others into action. Even as you do this, your own attitude and behaviour will be part of the message you are sharing. Through your own actions, you will make visible the ways in which congregants can connect with, serve and care for families in the FTD. When people hear about this season, they may have preconceived ideas, beliefs that it is too difficult, or think that somebody else is better suited to do it than they are. As the champion for the FTD, you get to model what it looks like, stirring interest in others, and a sense that they can do it.

Being an active role model, or example, of loving connections gives you credibility to call others to action. This allows you to challenge unhelpful attitudes in others, to encourage others to care for families and demonstrates your passion. We encourage you that as you plan and start implementing your ideas, that you don't only think about how others can do it. Consider how you can be modeling this for others.

It doesn't mean that you have to personally be part of every single service opportunity. It rather means that when you are a living example of connecting and caring for families, your team members, the church leadership and the congregation as a whole will listen with more intent when you are talking about this and inviting others in.

then what?

An important thing to remember is that the FTD team serves its local church. It is accountable to the leadership of that church – and not Sikunye. Sikunye is here to support, encourage, share resources and empower you to serve. We do not want any church to experience their FTD team as being misaligned, or independent of the church leadership. If your pastor is not aware or is not passionate about FTD, have a look at our [resource how to get your pastor on board](#).

We have discovered, however, that some people are so passionate about the opportunities and ministries within the FTD space, that they get frustrated with their church leaders for not being as excited as they are. Unfortunately, this can lead to FTD teams seeing pastors / church leaders as roadblocks / barriers / the 'problem' rather than seeing them as key allies. This breeds mistrust between the leaders and the FTD team, leading to relational breakdown and frustration.

Pastors hold the whole life of the church and want to see every area of church life grow. Your passion for families in the first thousand days is great, but there are other things in the church that require attention, pastoral care and leadership. Ensure you have empathy for other areas of church life that your pastors are carrying, and understand that you might not be able to get everything you want in the time you want. Be sure you ask your pastor what is on the heart of the leaders for the church at this time.

understand your local church

To effectively serve within your local congregation, it is important to understand how the early life team fits within the decision-making people and groups. It is not always clear who decides on what and how the FTD team fits within broader teams and decisions. Factors like the size of your congregation, leadership team and style of decision making will affect how your team will operate. We encourage you to sit with your pastor / key leader and ask questions about how you and your team fits within the broader structures. If possible, explore having a key leader / pastor that you account to. This tends to speed up decision making.

map out who does what

To best serve within your church leadership structures, it is important to make clear who decides on what. Some pastors or key leaders that you report to want to know a great level of details. Others will be fine with the headlines.

As you look at the ideas and plans for your team in the church, put names to the following four areas:

- Who is actually doing this task to completion? (Responsible)
- Assisting – who is helping the person who is responsible? (Assisting)
- Consulting – who do you need to 'check in with' to keep moving (Consulted)
- Informed – who do you need to keep up to date about this task (Informed)

Sometimes these can be limited to a project – like making changes to an area for moms to breastfeed, or it can be ongoing tasks, like bringing FTD-related prayer items to prayer meetings, organizing meal rosters for families in the FTD.

We encourage you to meet with your pastor, or key leader to map out these kinds of details. Talk through what ideas you have planned and ask how they want to be part of the process of planning, decision making and delivery. Typically, earlier in on the project requires more conversations with leaders, to ensure everyone is aligned.

Bring clarity to what you can, and a plan to bring clarity to areas that are not yet clear. Decisions around who is in your team, areas of teaching/ theology, if/ how money can be spent and communications normally require much more detailed conversations.

Together, agree on how they want to be kept up to date with how things are moving forward. This will help ensure that there is alignment and awareness. Keep reporting back on progress or challenges so that your pastor is informed and able to lead in this area.

“front of church” announcements and communication

Depending on your church culture and context, making announcements in a Sunday meeting may require permission several days in advance. It might be an announcement of a pregnancy or birth, a call for volunteers in an FTD ministry, a new opportunity that exists etc. Explore the best way of bringing an announcement on a Sunday, so that it is in line with how things normally operate. How much does the pastor

or key leader need to know about what you are announcing? In short, they should not be surprised by what you are saying. We encourage that you script what will be said and send it / talk it through with your leader so that they are fully aware of what will be said.

The same principles apply to using other media to communicate – WhatsApp groups, social media, noticeboards and newsletters. Seek permission first. Similarly, be sure you have the permission of the family, should you want to be sharing any details of pregnancy, birth or miscarriage.

general tips:

When engaging with leaders and volunteers who are perhaps already serving families or young children, be sure to help them see the value and opportunity of the First Thousand Days, and the church's role in it. For folks who are not yet aware of this, they may be defensive that someone is wanting to bring new ideas into an area that may have been their responsibility. Engage in a way that helps them to not get defensive but help them see the value and opportunity of FTD-specific activities to existing ministries. We encourage you to win them over to the ideas and opportunities, rather than assuming they should know this already.

We encourage you to gain the above clarity before you grow your team too quickly. Whilst it might feel like 'red tape', for the FTD team to effectively serve the church, it must work within the structures, leadership and processes, otherwise there will be friction and challenges that can slow down good ideas. If you are directly approaching people to serve in the FTD team, be sure that they talk to leaders in other ministries in which they might be serving. You don't want other ministries to experience the FTD team as being the one that 'poaches' people from other ministries.

When sharing updates with your key leader / leadership team, be sure to share positive news. It can be easy to only focus on challenges. You want your leaders to be sufficiently informed so that they can lead well. You also want them to experience the value of the FTD team and the work that is being accomplished. Feeling like you only bring complaints and frustrations will strain the working relationship.

ideas and resources

Having grown your awareness, conviction and knowledge in this area, are you seeing pregnant moms, new moms, families, single moms etc and reaching out to them? Here are some articles with practical tips on how to do that.

[Connecting and caring for families who are expecting new life.](#)

[Connecting and caring for families with newborns - 0-3 months.](#)

[Connecting and caring for families with 3-12 month olds.](#)

[Connecting and caring for families with children 1-2 years old.](#)

[How to create modern-day villages around mothers.](#)

[What if your pastor is not on board](#)

Be sure to tell stories from within your congregation. With the permission of the relevant families, you can share stories, or perhaps ask them to share their testimony in the church context.

Look at our website for more [resources on how to Speak Up](#)

platforms to use

- Visual spaces – posters, notice boards/ bulletins, handouts, PowerPoint slides.
- Announcements in a Sunday meeting.
- Social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.
- Direct messaging on WhatsApp..
- Emails.
- Life groups / small groups / other meetings (mid-week bible studies).

Discern how you can use the various resources and platforms within your church context. Perhaps connect with another FTD-friendly church that is similar to you to discover how they have integrated these ideas into the life of their church.

conclusion:

Be sensitive to how your church works behind the scenes. Working within those processes, teams and decision-making will help you in the short term and the long term. Remember, this is all about sustained ministry and change.