

Developing Resort/Leisure Ministries Through Your Church

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Every Church has the Opportunity

Every Family does it. No matter how rich or poor, how small or large, people find time to play. There is no better place for a church to reach people than when they are at play. The attitudes of people at play are almost always open to new ideas. We often fuss about our members who go on vacation or who take personal time to play. Instead of fussing, we should get them excited about sharing Christ wherever they go!

The love of Christ may be shared by youth or adults at festivals, golf course, beaches, or any other vacation area. The people of Davis, N.C., developed a ministry directed to the thousands of fishermen who come to the community each year. The youth at Spring Garden Baptist Church in New Bern, N.C., share Christ at a festival with families walking by, and the people of Shoreline Baptist share Christ with families on vacation at the Brunswick County beaches. Christians who travel away from home carry with them opportunities to share their faith while they are at play.

Every town and community has leisure events, such as street fairs, little league games, social events, golf tournaments, fishing tournaments, campgrounds, beaches, and mountains. There are people who will be willing and in need of some special touch from the Savior at these events. Your willingness to reach out to them at such events may be the only opportunity they have to meet Christ.

Understanding the Resort /Leisure Setting

People in resort settings are at rest and play. They have saved their money for the trip or event and they plan to enjoy it to the max. We often forget that people in resort/vacation settings have every minute planned out so that they get the most out of their time away from the regular schedule of life. However, they are always looking for new and interesting opportunities for fun. What an opportunity for us to bring exciting message of Christ to them. You would not minister to a camper in the same way that you would a golfer. Hunters have down time at night. Beach goers want peace and quiet when the sun is shining and excitement activity at night. Snow skiers are focused on hitting the slopes, but they have a lot of down time as they wait to board lifts. Festival/fair goers enjoy roaming around, and they love to take free stuff away with them. As you begin your resort ministry, consider the type of people you will be sharing the gospel with and focus your energies into finding a method that best communicates God's message to them.

Never forget the dynamics of a resort setting. You have people who live in the setting. They have special needs that should not be overlooked by all the "visitors". This is their community, so don't forget them. Activities geared toward residents will make them supportive of your ministry and it will also involve them in your work with tourists.

Seasonal workers come and go depending on the need and employment trends of the resort setting. These people make their living in the setting, and many work on Sundays and other times when church relationships are built. These workers need pastoral care and Christian relationships just like “regular” church members. Expand your church to meet their needs. It will be a blessing to them, your church, and to you.

What can My Church do to Reach People at Leisure?

Every church should be aware of the activities occurring in their area. Anywhere there are beaches, mountains, resort complexes, golf courses, parades, festivals, campgrounds, or parks, there is an opportunity for ministry. The goal is to reach people “where they are, when they are there”. You should reach out to not only the people on vacation, but also the employees of the resort and local area residents.

In beach, mountain, or campground areas, you might offer a first aid booth. Stock it with sunscreen, bandages, first aid ointment, and drinking water. When someone approaches you for help, offer gospel tracts, Bibles, or other information about the ministries of your church and area.

At a parade, your church could sponsor a float that carries an encouraging message to the community. At most parades, vendors have booths with food and drink for sale. If your church sells refreshments at a parade, serve drinks in cups imprinted with a biblical message and serve food in imprinted bags that spread the message of Christ. Your church could offer a first aid booth in conjunction with a rescue unit. If the festival in your area rents booths, secure one for your church. These offer wonderful opportunities for children’s ministry. You could have a puppet show, a sing-along, or any number of other ideas that would provide opportunities to share Christ with families.

More people are engaged in sports activities, such as golf, hunting, tennis, bowling, and horse back riding, than ever before. Take advantage of these activities! There are many national ministry groups with planned programs to share Christ when you are involved with these activities, such as: Christian Golfers Ministry, Legacy Outdoor Ministries, and Equestrian Ministries International. Each of these groups offer directed tools to share Christ while participating in activities you enjoy. Anywhere you have a gathering of people, you have an opportunity to witness and minister.

Every leisure setting lends itself to a simple worship setting, whether it is on the beach, snow skiing on the slopes, campground services, golf course vespers, vespers for festival and fair workers, and/or chaplains for events. Don’t try to take a formal worship experience to the beach. Make the service casual. Plan the service with consideration to your setting, and dress like those you will be ministering to.

What Scriptural Basis is there for Resort/Leisure Ministry?

Jesus performed His first miracle at a social function: the wedding at Cana (see John 2:1-11). Jesus spent much of His time ministering to the crowds everywhere He went, from the cities to the seaside – wherever people gathered, not just in the church house, but on the streets and the byways, where people lived! Jesus looked at the crowd and saw individuals. In Luke 19:1-10, Jesus pulled Zacchaeus out of the crowd to minister to him. Jesus’ disciples were ordinary people working and playing in the area He traveled. Acts 1:8 (NIV) says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”. This verse teaches us that we should take the message of Christ to people everywhere – even on vacation and at play – and not sit and wait for people to come to us.

What Benefit will Resort/Leisure Ministry Bring to Our Congregation?

We never know what God has in store for us. Renewed, purpose driven individuals have risen up to do things they never volunteered to do before after helping with a resort ministry. Churches, Sunday school classes, youth groups, and adult groups get excited and begin looking for additional ways to reach people after they have a positive experience at a campground, fair, festival, or beach worship. New churches have been started in places where special ministries were needed, from resort beach worship to fellowship groups at a golf course. How can you measure the benefits of doing what God called you as a Christian to do? He has called you to reach people, “Wherever they are, when they are there”.

Developing a Ministry Plan

- ❖ *Determine priorities for the ministry.* What do you hope to accomplish; who do you want to reach?
- ❖ *Calculate resources needed to conduct the ministry.* What resources are needed (i.e., money, manpower, tools, materials, etc.)?
- ❖ *Plan the actual ministry design.* In order to design the ministry, you must know who you are trying to reach and what you hope to accomplish.

Prepare for Ministry Activities

- ❖ *Enlist personnel and volunteers.* Involve people who believe in resort ministry. They will be supportive.
- ❖ *Train personnel and volunteers.* Most people are nervous about new experiences. Some simple training and prayer time with your volunteers will make them more comfortable and effective in ministering. If you teach them what to expect and how to react, they will teach others.
- ❖ *Secure resources and provide for the logistics needed for the ministry activity.* A good leader will never allow people to go into the field without what is needed to accomplish the goal. Be sure that all your materials are in place, that people are in place, and that all the bases are covered with where you are going. Be sure to contact those who control the area you hope to minister at (i.e., campground owners, golf pro’s, etc.), and that they are well informed and are supportive of the effort. These steps must be taken ahead of time. However, even with careful planning, things may not go as you planned. Remember, “Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape”. Be prepared for change! It will happen!

Carry out the Ministry Activity Plan

- ❖ *Pray with your team of volunteers.* Maintain an attitude of dependence on God. He will lead you and honor your efforts to each other with His love.
- ❖ *Be sensitive to people.* Always be aware of people’s needs. As they relax, you may discover special ministry needs and opportunities.
- ❖ *Be sensitive to your helpers and volunteers.* Your helpers may find themselves in situations where they need your help. Be aware of what they are doing, be sure that you are at the ministry location before they need you, and remember, “Blessed are the flexible”.

How can my Church Implement a Resort/Leisure Ministry?

- ❖ *Find out who is interested in doing what.* If your church has a mission committee or mission development team, they can head the search for mission/ministry evangelism opportunities. Your church could also conduct a commitment survey to determine where the interests of the members are. At this event/fellowship, you could have people share what they enjoy doing, as well as tell about events that take place (or are going to take place) in your community. Write these activities down. Find people who are interested in each area and put them to work. Have people minister at the activities they most enjoy (i.e., campers at campgrounds, golfers on golf courses, boaters on the waterway, and hunters with hunters, etc.). Recruit volunteers who are “people persons”. Anyone who is not enthusiastic about the place or activity of service could have a negative effect on the mission/ministry.
- ❖ *Have each group develop a mission statement.* Who do you wish to reach and what do you hope to accomplish? A mission statement will give the ministry team focus in planning and implementing the ministry.
- ❖ *Have the team brainstorm about ways to reach people.* This will build spirit and excitement for the work to come.
- ❖ *Inform your church leaders and congregation about what you are planning.* Promote the event and enlist prayer support from your fellowship.
- ❖ *Obtain permission, if permission is needed.* While you can witness anywhere, some places both private and public, have rules about what can be done or distributed on the property. Find out who makes decisions for the ministry location and deal with that person. Speaking to this person before you proceed with your ministry will save you a lot of time and effort. Be sure that you and your group obey the rules at the ministry location.
- ❖ *Plant the seed.* Remember, people in resort/leisure settings are there to relax. Therefore they need to be approached in a relaxed manner. Simple things work best. Give them things they can take away and think about. If you plant the seed, God will water it!

When to Begin

If you have at least one person willing to minister in a setting they love, you are ready to begin. Christ didn't wait until the crowd was large or until his disciples felt the time was right. He ministered when and where the people were, and so should our churches!