

# Campground Ministry

## Florida Baptist Convention

“How, then, can they call one the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Rom. 10:14-15, NIV).

A campground consists of any private, county, or state camping area that provides facilities for tent or recreational vehicle (RV) camping. Most offer daily, weekly, and monthly rates. In the Southern U.S., from Florida to California, most campgrounds are at capacity during the winter season.

### Why Minister?

There is a dual purpose for this ministry: To provide an evangelical Christian witness to non-believers and to provide opportunities for continued spiritual growth for believers.

### Relating in the World

As in every area of life, relationships are important in the leisure setting. The Christian must take the initiative to build meaningful relationships within the resort community. A balanced relationship with campground personnel will open doors to ministries and build good relations between the church and community.

As you approach management, relate to *their* needs. Seek to gain an understanding of their goals and offer to help meet these through the services you can provide to campers and employees. Avoid “church” language and spiritual cliches; speak their language so that a clear understanding exists. For example, offer a children’s day camp rather than Backyard Bible Club or a service rather than a ministry. Make a list of “church words” and translate them into everyday language. Be honest, but in the language they will understand. Be accepting, courteous, and appreciative. Remember Christ’s admonition to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

### Steps in beginning

- Elect a person, committee, or organization in the church to take leadership in this ministry.
- Survey camping facilities in your area. Determine if they are private, public, county, or state parks. Notice the type and age of person in the campground. Obtain a listing of services offered at the campground. Determine what other services are needed.
- Meet with the committee to brainstorm ideas that can meet the needs of the camping facility.
- Prioritize the ministry ideas.
- Determine what personnel, material, and financial resources are needed to carry out the ideas.
- Write a ministry proposal. Describe the project, the people who are responsible, time limits, and responsibilities of the church and the campground.

- Make an appointment to visit the campground management. Provide a written description of the proposal and verbally share your ideas with the management while listening to his or her idea of variations of your proposal. Contact needs to be made three months prior to the ministry starting date. Be flexible with your proposal. The manager could provide valuable advice on the timing of your project.
- Recruit and train volunteers for the ministry project. This includes training in the specific work and witness training. Include the rules, expectations, and desired outcome of the ministry.
- Promotion in the campground is crucial. Ask management for permission to promote the event. Promotion can include flyers, banners, camper visitation, newsletters, etc. Be sure to state the time, place, and sponsor of the activity.
- Implement ministry as planned. Remain flexible and be open to change as warranted. Keep all promises to management. Retain a positive attitude throughout the ministry.
- Evaluate the ministry. Get feedback from volunteers, campground management, and participants.
- Follow-up on professions of faith, recommitments, and those asking questions or interested in further contact.
- Write thank you notes to those involved in the ministry. Remember campground employees and management.
- Make plans for your next ministry project.

### Meeting the Needs

Opportunities in the public, private, county, or state camping facility are limited only to our own creativity. An overview of ideas is presented here.

### Hospitality Center

The hospitality center provides an opportunity to welcome the campers. The “center” can consist of a table in the registration area or outside the main office entrance. Campers can be given information on the camp, community, health services, places of interest, church information, and free fruit, juice, or snacks.

### Information Guide

An information guide could be provided to the campground for new camp arrivals. This guide would provide any information pertinent to the area, churches, grocery stores, hospitals, etc.

### Arrival Help

This ministry would involve volunteers being available to assist campers in setting up camp. These volunteers need to be knowledgeable on the procedure of setting up camping facilities.

### Nature Walk

A nature walk provides a perfect setting in which to bring campers into contact with God through the utilization of nature. Parables may be taught while describing the surrounding setting.

## Worship

Nature lends itself toward worship. One means of worship is to provide a satellite Sunday School in the campground. Another is to establish different times for worship for employees and campers. These services should be widely promoted through whatever channels are available. It is important that these services be *casual* and open to all denominations. The services should be kept to 30-45 minutes in length. Do not solicit an offering or invitation. Individual counseling can take place at the close of the service. Encourage audience participation through Scripture reading, responsive readings, and singing. It is vital that the service is held at a *convenient* time for the target group. Be flexible with the time so more people have an opportunity to worship.

## Chaplain-on-Call

Even in instances where worship services are prohibited, there can exist the need for a chaplain. Chaplains can respond to emergencies with employees and visitors plus provide a supportive role for management. Chaplains need to be well versed in responding to emergencies and be knowledgeable of helps available in the community. A certification process for volunteer chaplains may be available through your state Baptist convention.

## Pot Luck Dinners

These dinners, in which campers bring a dish of food with them, provide campers a chance to meet each other. These dinners provide the Christian a chance to: (1) provide Christian entertainment, (2) provide a *short* devotional, (3) make contact with campers in a casual setting, and (4) provide wholesome activities for campers.

## Exercise/Hobby Classes

Exercise classes provide an opportunity to establish relationships while assisting in the health of campers. Exercise/ hobby classes can consist of low impact aerobics, shuffleboard, hiking, fishing, square dancing, and crafts.

## Newsletter

A newsletter helps the camper keep up with camp activities and provides the Christian an opportunity to share Christ through writing.

## Evening Programs

Programs can range from churches providing entertainment to an ice cream social. These can be held weekly, monthly, or bi-monthly. A Christian witness is shared while campers are provided with special activities. Utilize puppets, clown, drama, and music. This is also a good activity for families.

## Holiday Activities

Since many senior adults are in "Sun-belt" states during the major holiday seasons it is important to remember those who are camping. Ideas include: Thanksgiving dinner; Christmas caroling, Christmas party, New Years party, and Easter sunrise services.

## Day Camp

A day camp for children, usually ages 4-11, can be established in the campground. Materials may include Backyard Bible Club, Christian daycamping material or Big A Club. (If not enough local volunteers are available, volunteers recruited through the state convention or North American Mission Board may assist in the beginning of this ministry.) Day camps

can be conducted three-to-five days a week for one-and-a-half to two hours. Always have adults available to share their faith with parents.

### Recreation

Various forms of recreation for the family can be established. This can include volleyball, softball, odd-ball olympics, etc. This provides a fun family time while giving the Christian opportunities to share Christ and Christian principles for family growth. A good giveaway is *Gods Word for the Family* by the American Bible Society.

### Parents' Night Out

This ministry can be set up at a church or in the campground. The parents are provided a chance to enjoy the area without the children, while enabling the children to meet and enjoy fun activities. Children who may have never heard the good news of Christ can be exposed to the gospel through Christian volunteers taking time to provide childcare in the campground.

### Evangelism

The heart of leisure missions is evangelism. Leisure evangelism is communicating the message of the gospel in common language to secular society.

Leisure evangelism involves being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and earning the right to be heard. Campers or campground employees must realize that Christians care before they will be open to hearing the gospel. Personal openness, common interests, and a listening ear help build trust in relationships.

The first step in building a witnessing relationship is to be friendly and sincerely care. Secondly, be at ease or "laid back." Next, listen to where the person is coming from—what do they believe and why? Once we've taken time to truly listen, the right to be heard has been earned. Then with a balance between urgency and sensitivity, the Christian shares his or her personal testimony. The task is to get the gospel to all who do not know Christ, recognizing not every person is at the same level of preparedness. A total reliance on the Holy Spirit's leadership is essential. In obedience, we share the good news, and the outcome is left to God.

### Summary

Prayerfully determine available resources and immediate needs in the campground. Do not be afraid to start small. It is of utmost importance that integrity is *always* maintained. Whatever is promised must be fulfilled. Be careful to find the balance of *all* that can be done and done *well*. Good planning is the key to success. Be overprepared, anticipating all that might occur. Remember limitations exist only in lack of imagination and creativity. Pray for open eyes to see—then do it.

"Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you'" (John 20:21, NIV).

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