

County Fair Ministry

Florida Baptist Convention

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” “. . . I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me”—Jesus (Matt. 25:35-36, 40, NIV).

A county fair is an annual event of exhibits of agricultural products, livestock, machinery, crafts and entertainment; usually including a midway of carnival games, rides and foods.

Why Minister?

Ministry is needed at the county fair for two primary reasons: (1) the high concentration of the public present who need to hear of the Good News of Jesus and to know that Christians care, and (2) the multiples of workers including security, fair personnel, concessionaires, exhibitors and carnies who each have their own sets of needs.

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 leisure community. A balanced relationship with fair 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 event participants and workers. Avoid “church” language and spiritual clichés; 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.
- Attend the event and experience it. Are there any present ministries? What are the unmet needs? What ministries will meet the discovered needs?
- Meet with the committee to brainstorm ideas for ministries to meet discovered needs.
- Determine personnel, financial, and material resources needed to carry out the ministry.
- Write a ministry proposal defining what will be done, how this will be accomplished, by whom, time allotment, responsible person(s), especially including how this could improve enhance the event. Be prepared to pay-your-way without expecting any privileges from management for services rendered. Maintain integrity across-the-board in the project.
- Make a personal visit with management to share the proposal at least two to six months prior to starting date of the fair. Accept suggestions and redesign proposal as necessary.

- Recruit volunteers for every phase of the ministries.

Publicize. Publicize. Publicize. Promote through event brochures, newspapers, flyers, radio, signs, television, word of mouth, any way appropriate for the project. Promotional materials should reflect quality, telling what, when, where, and by whom.

- Secure/collect financial and material resources.
- Train volunteers. Include training in appropriate evangelistic methods and other special skills as needed. Make expectations and tasks as specific and clear as possible.
- Carry out the ministry as planned. Be sure to do everything promised to management. Be flexible and always maintain a positive attitude.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each phase of the ministry and the overall project. Ask for feedback from the management and volunteers.
- Follow up on any professions of faith or recommitments to Christ. Follow-up could be in the form of referring the new believer to ministries at their next location and calling pastors or directors of mission in that area to request follow-up.
- Write thank you notes to volunteers, event organizers and management.
- Begin planning for next year.

Meeting the Needs

An overview of tried ideas are presented here. Determine objectives and choose the target group(s): the public and/or workers. Choose avenues of ministry as needs at the fair dictate. Only choose what can be done well. Remember possibilities are only limited by the creativity of the Holy Spirit.

Chaplaincy/Counseling

A designated chaplain — associational staff person, church staff person, associate pastor, retired minister, pastor, volunteer chaplain — can be named as the “Chaplain for the Fair.” This person would make him/herself available to the workers at the fair and their families. The chaplain has to take initiative to get to know workers and be available as counseling needs arise. This person may also be responsible to lead or plan worship services on site.

Worship

Worship opportunities should be offered at times and on days convenient to workers. Arrange worship service location with fair personnel well in advance of the event. Publicize through flyers, word of mouth, loudspeaker announcements and concessionaire/exhibitor materials produced by fair management. Limit service to 30-35 minutes. Be creative by incorporating drama, different musical instruments, and/or testimonies from new converts among workers. Include audience participation activities through Scripture reading, responsive reading and singing. Present a short timely devotional. Provide words to songs and New Testaments for gifts. Do not solicit an offering. Give an invitation for persons with questions or seeking more information to remain following the service rather than having an alter call. This service must be interdenominational in nature. Bible study/ devotional time could be offered informally each morning for 5-10 minutes in the coffee distribution area or another designated central location.

Children's Day Camp

Workers often have children with them at the fair. Offering a day camp for their children gives parents some break time, encourages the children, teaches the children of Jesus and His love, and speaks volumes to parents of caring concern. Backyard Bible Club materials are excellent to use or Big A materials. Meeting time for the camp should fit parents' schedules. Location should be out of traffic flow while safe and conducive for camp activities. Starting and stopping times should be clearly identified. Publicize thoroughly.

Hospitality

Offer a designated location where workers may rest during breaks or off-hours. Coffee and ice water are greatly appreciated. Nourishing food can be lacking in workers diets so that muffins and citrus are appreciated, too. Other flip-top canned foods or other staples may be made available as well.

Hospitality for the public could include ice water at some central location with chairs for resting and volunteers for conversation.

Children's Area

In a designated area, under an open tent or in another sheltered place, set up face painting, clowning, puppet shows, an art area, recreation or entertainment geared to children. Provide a rack or table with free materials including tracts and/or New Testaments. Work closely with management so there is no competition with vendors in any of these areas. Be prepared to rent the set-up area from management.

Information Booth/Lost And Found

This provides a great service to management as well as the public by providing information to assist in enjoying the event plus the convenience of a reputable lost and found area. Literature and Scripture portions can be made available with management approval.

Booth

Rent a booth. Train the volunteers who staff it. Display the history of the association and its churches. Provide free materials including associational church directories, promotional brochures from churches, tracts and/or Bibles. Provide cold water and coffee if permitted by management. A corner of the booth could be set aside for resting or counseling.

Dental Clinic

Offer emergency dental care by scheduling a mobile dental clinic on site. Publicize as emergency dental care, free for all workers who need it. Be prepared to help with prescription medications following tooth extractions, and/or transportation to the pharmacy.

Clothing

A clothing closet with work clothes/shoes, jackets, new underwear, socks, and bedding may be set up on site in a tent or other protected area.

Free Materials Giveaway

A free materials rack near the chaplain's area may be filled with New Testaments, tracts, Scripture portions or specially designated materials for the fair. Giveaways could be part of

the hospitality area for the public. However, be sensitive to concessionaires and knowledgeable of management regulations prior to offering any giveaways.

Diaper Changing Area

Provide padded tables with disposable paper coverings, disinfectant, wipes, paper towels and a few extra diapers in an easily accessible but protected area. Print directions for use and cleanup of the area noting it is provided by a Baptist church(es) that cares about people. Volunteers may staff the area although parents do the changing. New Testaments, tracts, and church information should be made available. If the area is private with chairs provided, mothers may find it convenient to nurse their babies.

Entertainment

Provide free entertainment involving puppet shows, clowns, magic, mime, and music groups. Puppet shows should be music-oriented, instead of spoken dialogue. Music should provide a variety that would appeal to most age groups including upbeat 50's, 60's, beach, pop, country, and patriotic with a mixture of secular and sacred. Clowns may be used to provide a few skits that involve audience participation as well as walk around entertainment giving out balloons and stickers.

Evangelism

The heart of resort/leisure missions is evangelism. A county fair is a secular setting. People's understanding of reality is what they can see and touch. Leisure evangelism is communicating in the vernacular the message of the Gospel to secular society. This requires an understanding of the hearer's thought patterns. Our words are interpreted according to his existing frame of reference.

Leisure evangelism involves being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and earning the right to be heard. Visitors and fair employees must realize that we as Christians care before they will be open to 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, the Christian must be at ease or "laid back." Next, the Christian should 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 personal testimony. A low-keyed approach is preferable for leisure evangelism. 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. In obedience, we share the Good News, and the outcome is left to God.

Summary

Prayerfully determine available resources and immediate needs at the fair. Don't 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*. See the fields white for harvest at the fairgrounds and ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest field. Season all that is done with evangelism by caring about individuals and daring to listen, offering Jesus' love appropriately and sensitively in each situation. Don't go with quick answers but with a broken heart for the lost, then love them

to Jesus. 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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