

Ministry at Fairs and Festivals

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The phrase “resort and leisure missions” often conjures up all sorts of exotic images for us. We tend to be captivated by the mesmerizing glamour and prestige of ministries in places like Gatlinburg, Vail, Waikiki, Lake Tahoe, and Orlando. And in doing so we make the mistake of assuming that resort and leisure ministries can only take place in settings far removed from our local communities. The truth is that some of the best opportunities for outreach in leisure and resort settings exist right in the midst of our own home towns, with persons who may even live nearby.

Local fairs, festivals, and other celebrations are natural places for people to gather. In fact, the ability of such special events to attract crowds is the very reason that some communities promote and host various “manufactured” happenings. Even world-class resort settings use special events to draw people to their areas.

The nature of some major resort/leisure settings (location, abundance of people, availability of housing, willingness of persons to spend money, etc.) makes them places that attract short-term happenings or activities such as fairs, festivals, and parades, and even trade shows and conventions. Of course, these events also take place in other than “resort” settings.

In certain places, a fair or similar event may even be what gives a particular location its identity as a resort or leisure setting, e.g. state fairs and annual heritage festivals. In other locations, the fairs and festivals are so much a part of the local resort/leisure lifestyle that it is impossible to think of either one as a separate entity. And in still other settings, the relationship between the special event and the resort and leisure community may be a coexistence that is only occasionally peaceful.

But in all these areas, fairs, festivals, flea markets, and similar events present us with unique opportunities to share the Gospel and make inroads into the community. Anytime that people gather, there will be needs that cry out to be met and occasions for Christian ministry.

A Sampler of Ministry Possibilities

Where?

State fairs

Regional fairs

County/parish fairs

Carnivals

Rodeos

Craft festivals

Art/music festivals

Community concerts

Parades

Heritage/ethnic festivals

Frontier/pioneer days

Seasonal festivals

Agricultural expositions

Seafood festivals

Historical re-enactments
Flea markets
Antique shows
Hobby conventions
Trade shows conventions
Industrial expositions
Sports events
Holiday events

To Whom?

Visitors
Customers
Attendees
Local people
Participants
Performers
Exhibitors
Employees
Organizers
Promoters
Management personnel
Concessionaires
Security personnel
Service personnel
Families of exhibitors

Why Be Involved?

- To demonstrate the love of Christ and show the limitless realm of God's concern.
- To build relationships through which the love of God can be communicated.
- To share the gospel through verbal witness, Scripture distribution, music, drama, mime, clowning, etc.
- To meet human needs and personal aspirations with appropriate services and activities.
- To call out Christians to a life of active witness in ministry.
- To establish an identity as a group that truly cares about people, even those persons on the fringes.

How to Be Involved:

Find out about the event — What's going on? Who will be there?

Start at the top with "the owner" — the individual or group that is in charge of the event

Seek additional information from: chamber of commerce, tourist bureau, local government, etc.

See what needs and aspirations exist: Where do people hurt? What are they seeking? What is already being done for them?

Envision ministries: How could we possibly help?

Who can we help most effectively?

ORDER PRIORITIES ?

CONSIDER RESOURCES ?

DETERMINE MINISTRY FOCUS

How will we help?

Assemble resources. Get commitments. Structure potential ministry with quality and integrity.

Make commitments. Pay your way. Earn your place.

Carry out promises. Do the ministry.

Be involved throughout the operation of the event: before, during, and after.

Provide adequate follow-through: continued contact, referral, and appropriate follow-up.

Evaluate and plan for next time.

Possibilities for Ministry

Booths/exhibits

- To distribute Scripture portions, literature, and information on ministry activities.
- To provide opportunities for witness with other exhibitors, as well as the general public.

(Note: Christians who have products or skills that are appropriate for a particular event should be encouraged to participate as exhibitors. In fact, at those events where restrictions might limit or preclude having a booth with a religious theme or focus, Christian exhibitors would still be able to provide an effective witness to the public and to their fellow exhibitors.)

See "Using Booths in Ministry," pages F-55 ff., for more ideas.

Parade Floats

To provide a Christian interpretation of the theme of the parade, as well as communicate involvement in, and concern for, the community.

Street Witness

Through clowning, mime, magic/illusion, juggling, and drama.

Entertainment

Through choirs, handbell groups, instrumental or vocal ensembles.

Rest Areas

Providing a place to sit, possibly with alternative refreshment like "a cup of cold water."

Children's Programs

Day camping, recreation, and similar activities.

Supplemental Program Features

Speakers, how-to clinics, dramatic interpretations and presentations.

Supplemental Human Services

Chaplains, crisis counselors, childcare, housing bureau for visitors, and so on.

Supplemental Personnel

Guides, interpreters, parking lot attendants, traffic control, and set-up/breakdown/cleanup people.

Temporary Relief Personnel

Qualified "booth sitters" for exhibitors, etc.

Hospitality Services

Providing coffee breaks, messenger service, etc., for the event staff.

Be Creative!

Let your activities reflect the specific nature and needs of the particular fair or festival at which you are ministering. What someone else has done in another setting may or may not work in your own situation. Remember, new frontiers and new opportunities often call for new dreams and new visions.

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