

# Resort Chaplaincy: An Introduction

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Chaplaincy in resort and other leisure settings represents a steadily growing opportunity for ministry to people who work and play in such areas all around the country. Resort chaplaincy plays an important role in ministry programs in Gatlinburg, Tenn.; Branson, Mo.; North Lake Tahoe, Calif.; and Myrtle Beach, S.C. Through this introduction of resort chaplaincy, we will discuss the responsibilities of resort chaplains and how to establish a resort chaplaincy program.

Resort chaplaincy can be defined as a non-denominational counseling and program service to people in resort business settings. This general definition allows many different types of resort chaplaincy programs to emerge. Each ministry must interpret the definition to meet its own particular needs, goals, and resort. Presently, several types of resort chaplaincy programs exist. These types include:

## 1. Full-time chaplain within resort.

This program works best within a large resort, attraction, or theme park. It includes a formal agreement between the resort and the ministry. Through this agreement the company provides the chaplain total access to its resort and employees. The chaplaincy program between Dollywood and Smoky Mountain Resort Ministries represents an example of this type of program.

## 2. Full-time chaplain outside resort.

This program works best in a resort community with a strip or main street. In this program the chaplain provides ministry services to many different resort businesses in one particular area. Mountain Country Ministries in Branson, Mo., represents an example of this type of program as it provides chaplain service to the theaters, restaurants, and motels in the Branson area.

## 3. Bi-vocational chaplain.

This program works best in small resorts and attractions, but can be used in any situation. With this program the chaplain works as an employee of the resort while still providing chaplain services. The chaplain benefits from this arrangement by validating his or her presence among the employees. Smoky Mountain Resort Ministries provides a bi-vocational chaplain into The Track, a go-cart amusement part, every summer.

## 4. Layperson chaplain.

This program works well in areas with many large resorts. It also makes a good outreach ministry for a resort church. In this program the layperson provides the program services to the resort and as much relational ministry as possible. In Tahoe City, Calif., First Baptist Church selects lay people to be ski chaplains during the ski season. Through the layperson chaplains, the church ministers to the many ski resorts that surround them.

Although each of these types of resort chaplaincy programs differ in set up, every resort chaplain carries similar ministry responsibilities. A resort chaplain is defined as a minister who is equipped by experience, attitude, and training to offer pastoral ministry programs in resort settings for people of all religious faith as well as those who claim no church affiliation. The specific responsibilities of a resort chaplain can include:

### 1. Be the chaplain.

A resort chaplain must have the freedom within the resort to minister. As a ministry sets up a chaplaincy program with a resort it needs to establish the person as the chaplain. This means being able to go where the employees are, such as break areas or behind the scenes.

### 2. Serve within the framework of the resort.

The chaplain must never interfere with the work of the employees and must always follow company policy. This establishes trust between the resort and the chaplain. Mike Elrod, General Manager at The Track in Pigeon Forge says, "The chaplain must remain low key . . . always asking before doing something." The chaplain does this by establishing a liaison within the resort to help interpret company policy.

### 3. Visitation.

The chaplain establishes ministry relationships within the resort through visitation. The chaplain should visit all areas of the resort to extend the ministry presence to all employees.

### 4. Witnessing.

The chaplain's essential responsibility must be to share the love of Jesus Christ to the individuals at the resort. The chaplain does this through the ministry relationships as well as ministry programs.

### 5. Crisis ministry.

The chaplain provides crisis ministry at the resort. The chaplain must respond with a presence of ministry whenever a death, accident, or other situation occurs at the resort.

### 6. Personal counseling.

The chaplain develops a system of personal counseling to employees and guests. Counseling takes on many roles within the resort from formal counseling sessions to informal opportunities to give a listening ear. The chaplain must also recognize where his or her experience ends and be willing to refer people to professional counselors.

### 7. Pastoral responsibilities.

The resort chaplain ministers to many people who slip between the cracks of the local church. People ask resort chaplains to perform weddings and funerals because they are the only minister the person knows. Full time resort chaplains need to be ordained. Being able to perform weddings and funeral increases the chaplain's validity within the resort.

### 8. Develop and maintain programs of ministry.

The chaplain establishes and maintains ministry programs within the resort such as worship services, Bible studies, and recreational activities. These programs give resort employees and guests the opportunity to experience God while working and playing at the resort. The ministry programs also help to establish the chaplain at the resort.

### 9. Monthly report.

The resort chaplain makes a monthly report to the resort and to the ministry to show the progress of the chaplaincy program. This record of the number of programs, ministry opportunities and visits helps indicate the growth of ministry over the years and helps in the evaluation of the chaplaincy ministry.

With this understanding of the responsibilities of a resort chaplain, let us now look at a systematic approach at beginning a resort chaplaincy program.

A resort ministry must first secure adequate information about the resort to begin establishing a chaplaincy program. Do everything possible to get to know the resort. Go there as a visitor, do research on the size of the attraction, the number of employees and where they come from. Find out who owns the park and learn the names of top management. It is vital to understand the resort in order to determine the type of resort chaplaincy program needed.

The next step requires the ministry to discover and secure an advocate within the resort. An advocate is someone who will be on the side of the chaplaincy program within the resort. This is not absolutely necessary to establish a chaplaincy ministry, but it helps tremendously. An advocate can be found in or through a local church.

The advocate helps secure information about the resort, such as the names of top management, company policy, and company terminology. The advocate also works as a supporter of the chaplaincy ministry and programs within the resort. When beginning worship services at a resort it is reassuring to know that there will be at least one person in attendance.

After gaining as much information and support as possible the ministry must decide on its plan of action. There must be a decision about what type of chaplain will be needed. Will the chaplain work best full-time or will the resort be expected to provide a job? Will lay people be adequate for this ministry? There must also be a decision about what type of person will be needed for the chaplain position. Does the chaplain need to be male, female, or does it matter? What special qualifications will the chaplain need to have? Will there be a need for the chaplain to be endorsed by the North American Mission Board or other agency? How long will the chaplain commit to the chaplaincy program? The ministry must also decide on the types of programs it wants to offer. Is it feasible to have an employee worship service? Now is also the time to decide possible times for the programs and where they could be located. Finally, there must be a decision on the transition to the chaplaincy program. Who can fill in until a permanent chaplain is found? Where can a chaplain be found? The ministry must decide on a clear and complete plan of action for the resort chaplaincy program it wants to establish.

With this plan of action, the ministry now must convince the resort management to allow the resort chaplaincy program. Here are some tips in doing this:

1. Go to the top first.

It may take time to get to the top management, but keep trying. Without top management's commitment to the chaplaincy program, it will not work.

2. Have clear ideas about the program.

When approaching management, explain the plan of action clearly. Be very organized and know what you are talking about.

3. Develop a written proposal for the chaplaincy program. Present a written proposal of the chaplaincy program to the resort management as part of the presentation. This proposal should include:

- (1) Objective—to establish a chaplaincy program.

- (2) Definitions—define local ministry, its sponsors, and its purpose. Define resort chaplain.

(3) Relationships—state the type of relationship with the resort that is being proposed. State what would be required of the resort and the ministry.

(4) Qualifications—state whether the chaplain will be ordained or not. State what type of education will be required.

(5) Responsibilities—state the expected responsibilities of the chaplain (visitation, worship service, Bible study).

4. Use company terminology.

This needs to be included in the written proposal as well at the presentation.

5. Be professional.

These are business people. Come prepared or nothing will be accomplished.

6. Timing is important.

Because resorts are seasonal, approach management at a less busy and stressful time of the year. This allows the resort to spend more time and energy on the chaplaincy program.

7. Be flexible.

Listen to what the resort wants from the chaplaincy program. Work to mold the chaplaincy program around the resorts needs, wants, and ideas. Rejoice with any advancement into the resort.

8. Remember, it works!

Be confident in meeting with management that resort chaplaincy is a quality product. The needs of the resort are there, point them out, exercise boldness. Be willing to explain how the resort can benefit from the chaplaincy program (better image, employees, and product). Use national chaplaincy references from successful ministries, companies with resort chaplains, and the North American Mission Board's chaplaincy evangelism team. There is everything to gain and nothing to lose.

With all of this done, and a bit of divine grace, a new resort chaplaincy program will be off the ground. As the ministry begins, the chaplain needs to keep a few things in mind.

The chaplain must first get exposure for himself or herself, for the chaplain position, and for the ministry programs offered. When working with one resort this can be done through the company newsletter, announcements on bulletin boards, and orientations. When working outside of a resort, work to get exposure in the local media, distribute cards and brochures to area businesses, and speak at orientations or employee gatherings during the year.

Another thing a new chaplain will want to do is get to know the resort and local area as soon as possible. Learn the company terminology. Know where everything is located. Become an expert about the resort and the company. This can be done by going through a company orientation, from the advocate within the resort, and from employees.

Finally, the new chaplain must work at learning names, people, and situations as soon as possible. As the new chaplain does this, he or she will earn the trust of the employees and the resort. Once this trust has been established true ministry will begin.

Adapted from material by Eric Spivey in the 1993 National Resort Ministries Conference notebook. Used by permission.