

Ministries with Waterfolk

Sam and Betty Anne Schlegel

Water has a profound effect on all life on our planet. With over three-quarters of the Earth's surface covered by water in the form of oceans, seas, bays, estuaries, rivers, lakes, waterways, streams, canals, and wetlands, it is not hard to understand how water has had a major impact on the course of human existence. But there are many people whose lives are particularly affected and influenced by the existence of navigable bodies of water. These are individuals whose interests, livelihoods, and lifestyles center around the water and boating endeavors, the people we refer to as waterfolk—people whose boat is their home.

To share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all people, Christians need to reach beyond the shoreline and minister to the needs of waterfolk. Quite often, churches design programs around land-based, traditional-community oriented persons. Since many waterfolk may spend their weekends on the water and still others may be quite mobile, innovative methods of outreach are needed that show understanding, adaptability, creativity, and commitment.

There can be a large variety of interests and lifestyles among the different groups of waterfolk in one geographic area, including liveaboards, seasonal cruisers, weekend sailors and boaters, yacht crews, commercial fishermen, and marina and boatyard workers. Some may be local residents; others may be seasonal; others may be there just for the weekend; and some are only passing through on their way to somewhere else. One individual may spend his or her weekends completing a boatbuilding project, while another may race his or her hydroplane in national competition. Yet another, may be gone on his or her yacht for several months, visiting in the islands with friends. However, all share an interest in boating and enjoy time on the water.

Other waterfolk are involved with boats on a more professional level, such as designers, builders, brokers, and maintenance people. An introduction to the fast-paced world of the boating industry can be quite overwhelming at one of the major boat shows. Competition is high, and the state of the world economy has a significant impact on job pressure, family stress, and personal security. In spite of the glitter of such high finance environments, ministry needs are evident, especially in such “pressure cooker” events.

Some opportunities for outreach to waterfolk will even be in the realm of multihousing ministries, for there is the liveaboard variety of waterfolk. Even families with children live on boats. Marinas and anchorages are their communities and neighborhoods, with waterways and open seas their avenues to a wider world beyond. While most effective ministries among live-aboards are carried out by other waterfolk, churches can have creative, ongoing ministries with them.

To effectively share a redemptive gospel message with waterfolk, and others, Christians must go where people are. They must see people's needs, and find ways to extend friendship and acceptance of them as individuals for whom Jesus lived and died. Even on the water.

Why Be Involved?

- To demonstrate the love of Christ and show the limitless realm of God's concern to people in settings and activities that center around water and boating.
- To build relationships through which the love of God can be communicated to waterfolk and within their groups.
- To share the gospel through verbal witness, Scripture distribution, music, Bible study, share groups, et cetera.
- To meet human needs and personal aspirations with services and activities done in the name of Christ.
- To call out Christian waterfolk to a life of active witness and ministry.
- To establish an identity as followers of Jesus Christ who truly care about all people, even those persons around the water and boating.

How to Get Started.

Learn about waterfolk—Read magazines and books that they enjoy. Learn their vocabulary. Get to know them personally. Make friends. Visit in marinas, at boat ramps, and in boating and fishing supply stores. Attend special boating events. Participate. Find out people's patterns of activity: where they come from, when they go out on the water and return, where they reside during different seasons. Discover groups they participate in—clubs, associations, and schools. Take a course in a particular water sport or even a boating safety course.

Determine what is needed—Learn what needs and aspirations people on the water have. Where do they hurt? What are they seeking? What is being done for them? Who can we help most effectively?

Order priorities

Consider resources

Decide on ministry focus

A Sample of Ministry Possibilities

Where?

anchorage/moorings

bait and tackle shops

blessings of fleets

boat launching areas

boat parades

boat rentals

boat shows

boatyards

charterboat docks

commercial vessels

ferry landings

fishing tournaments

lakes

marinas

marine supply shops
maritime museums
personal docks
regattas
rivers
seafood/maritime festivals
special interest clubs
watercraft festivals
waterways
yacht clubs

To Whom?

agency personnel:

boat brokers
boat builders
boatyard workers
bridge tenders
club members
Coast Guard
dockmasters
management/owners
marina employees
Marine Patrol

boat owners

boating industry

charter captains/crews

commercial fishermen

liveaboards

recreational boaters:

fishermen
fishing guides
instructors
jet skiers
kayakers
river guides
sailboarders
skiers
weekend boaters

seasonal cruisers

vacationers

What Kinds of Ministries?

- Bible studies/worship: aboard personal boats, within boating businesses, in marinas and yacht club facilities; prayer breakfasts for fishermen and charterboat crews
- Relational evangelism: within boating groups, among friends, within marina communities and anchorages

- Scripture/materials distribution: special edition Bibles and Scripture selections for boaters; lending libraries at marinas, clubs, marine/fishing supply stores
- Children's programs: day camping at special events, dockside Bible clubs, child care for transient boaters
- Counseling: chaplaincy, personal and pastoral counseling, support groups for families with members away
- Crisis ministries: stranded boater relief, medical referrals, boating accident help
- Hospitality: ditty bag kits for transient boaters, waterfront hospitality centers, mail receipt and forwarding, bicycles
- Special programs in marina or club areas, on special topics (e.g., water safety, cruising tips) or provide entertainment in waterfront settings
- Special event ministries: booths at boat shows and fishing expositions; chaplains, boat parade entries, and prayer breakfasts at fleet blessings; workshops, worship, and children's programs at maritime festivals, small craft gatherings, and fishing tournaments
- Ministries using boats: special worship services; dinner cruises, rafting/canoeing trips, sail training—all with Christian direction and perspective

Be Creative!

Let your activities reflect the specific nature and needs of the particular setting in which you are ministering. What someone else has done in another place 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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