

Interfaith Witness In Resort/Leisure Settings

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Certain dynamics of a resort area make it attractive to people of non-traditional Christian values. Perhaps it is the laid back way of life where eccentricity is acceptable that draws people. Perhaps it is the heavy emphasis on having fun and being carefree, focusing on the here-and-now, which makes people more open to new ideas than when they are in their home setting.

In resort areas, you are likely to encounter a number of Christian deviations, such as Mormonism, Armstrongism, Jehovah's Witness, or extreme authoritarian cults. You may meet many people of the Catholic faith, or the Nation of Islam, or Sikh (pronounced "seek"), or Hindu. You are most likely to encounter New Agers of every persuasion, and members of many different occult groups.

Some of them will not be recognizable as a member of a particular group, yet, their beliefs will be vastly different from mainstream Christianity. They may be tourists, children at a day camp, the waiter at the steak house, the maid at the hotel, the motel operator, or the lifeguard at the beach. To be effective in sharing our faith with them, it is imperative that we recognize and deal with certain dynamics.

1. What is the world view of the other person? Another way to ask this question is to ask what the other person assumes to be true about himself, his world, and his god. While Christians understand God to be personal, New Age adherents think of God as a divine essence that is within each of us, thus we are really gods. Others may view the world as a cosmic struggle between the evil forces and the good forces. They believe these forces, sometimes thought of as spirits, or powers, can be understood, manipulated, and redirected by man.

If the world view of the person is not the same as that of the Christian, then it will take some time to build the foundation of understanding necessary for the witness to be effective.

2. View the person to whom you are witnessing as a total person, not just "a Mormon," or "a New Ager." Their religious belief is their way of making sense out of a world which often does not make a lot of sense. Christians are aided by the Bible, their prayer time, a fellowship of believers, and the ever-present Jesus Christ. The lost person looks to his or her support group for strength as well. This means that the Mormon or the New Ager is a real human with real human needs. They are the kind of person Jesus died to save. The Christian must have compassion on these people and look for those needs to be met. Often, effective Christian witnessing is sharing how Christ meets the most basic needs of our human life.

3. Try to determine the level of commitment of the person to whom you are sharing your faith. Not everyone who is Jehovah's Witness is an active supporter of that cause. Some people have dropped out but still identify with the group. Others may have married into the group and have not made a deep commitment to the group. Others may be disenfranchised and feel hurt, and fatalistically hopeless.

At this point, people of other faiths are no different than are people of the Christian faith groups. Still, at best, witnessing across religious lines is often a slow process.

4. Have a clear understanding of your own beliefs and of the biblical support for these beliefs. This is especially critical in interfaith witnessing. Others may have a better understanding of your faith than you do. Many groups study what others believe and practice how to counter those beliefs with their own Scriptures and reasoning.
5. As you share your faith, be sensitive to the subtle differences in the meaning of words. Salvation to the Christian is not the same to any other faith, though both groups may use the term. "God" is not the same to the Christian as it is to the Buddhist. "Sin" also takes on a variety of meanings.

It is good to get the other person to explain his or her beliefs, rather than to answer "yes or no" questions. Often, thinking about the beliefs brings up inconsistencies in the mind of the believer.

6. Arguing over points of doctrines is foolishness. Argument only pits one person against another in a struggle for sake of the ego. One person will win and one will lose. The loser may feel rejected and humiliated. Jesus never argued with those who were different. He simply stated the truth in a compassionate way, and left the other person to make his or her own decision.
7. As you share the gospel, keep the presentation simple and biblical. Some of the best themes are the person and work of Jesus Christ, or the doctrine of salvation by grace. With some groups, to present Jesus as the High Priest that stands between God and man is effective. Do not try to explain every doctrine of the Christian faith. Not every doctrine is essential for salvation.

Emphasize that salvation is a relationship with Jesus Christ. Use Scripture to back your points. Establish the authority of the Bible early in the encounter.

8. Understand the negative factors against which the person must resist in order to accept the Christian faith. Obviously, sin and pride, embarrassment, and family and peer pressure. Some have to literally choose between Christ and family (perhaps centuries of ancestors). Grief over the loss of a former religion is a real factor to deal with. The Christian must be very sensitive to this and be understanding of the necessary grieving of the new convert.
9. Leave the door open to another visit. Rarely is one of another faith group won to Christ the first time a witness is shared with them. Be patient and let the Holy Spirit guide you.

Adapted from an article by Wayne Taylor in the 1993 National Resort Ministries Conference notebook. Used by permission