

# Ministry with Lifeguards

## James and Hannah Hanson

A resort area will usually have a great number of seasonal employees. Although there are similarities, each resort area and each group of seasonal employees will have its own distinct characteristics. One must take these characteristics into consideration when ministering to these groups.

Lifeguards are no different. The first priority in starting or improving a ministry to lifeguards should be to learn as much as you can about them and the situation in which you will be ministering. The following is a list of questions you will want to answer about your particular situation:

- Where do the lifeguards come from? Are they locals or do they move here just for the summer?
- What is their season to work—Memorial Day to Labor Day?
- Who are their employers? Are they employed by the city, county, or independent beach services?
- What are their work conditions? (hours, pay, time off, etc.)
- What is their average age, education level, and socioeconomic status?
- Who are some other groups who work on the beach that could be included in your ministry? (boat/bike renters, quench girls, beach boys, vendors, etc.)
- What are their needs/wants?
- Is anyone else ministering to this group? If so, how? Will your ministry interfere with theirs?

This is by no means an exhaustive list. It is a start. The more you know, the better you will be in your ministry. You can find answers to these questions from your own observations, talking to the lifeguards, and from talking to the owners of the beach services or the lifeguards' supervisors. It is important to approach the management and/or owners before beginning an official ministry. It is also important to maintain good communication and relationships with management throughout the ministry.

### Visitation

The foundation of this type ministry is building relationships. A person can earn the right to share the gospel through a caring one-on-one relationship. This is best accomplished by visiting the lifeguards at their job—on the beach. In Myrtle Beach, S.C., there are over 200 guards spread out over the 60 miles of the Grand Strand. The summer staff is divided into pairs and each pair is assigned a section of beach for the entire summer. Those ministering will then visit the guards on their beach at least once a week. In areas where there are fewer lifeguards and/or they are in a more concentrated area, you may be able to do an effective job with less people. The maximum number of lifeguards assigned to each team will vary with manpower and the time allotted to this ministry. A maximum of 25 guards per team seems to work well. At the beginning of the summer, the visits will not consist of much more than introductions and basically getting to know one another. Relationships develop as the season progresses. Gradually, the staffers will gain the opportunity to share the message of Jesus.

There are a few things to be aware of when making visits. First of all, the lifeguards are working. Do not do anything to hinder them from doing their job, whether that is watching the water or renting an umbrella and chairs. Second, be conscious of not over-staying your welcome. A 5-10 minute visit is sufficient, especially at the beginning of the summer. Lastly, remember that you will not always be welcomed with open arms. Many times the guards will be skeptical, apathetic, intimidated, or just generally cold to you. Do not be discouraged. These are the walls that a caring relationship can break down.

Visitation can serve as the building block upon which further ministry can take place. As you sense needs during your visits, think of creative ways to meet those needs. This can be anything from taking baked goods and cold water to them at their stands, to counseling them in a crisis situation, to holding a Bible study for them before they go to work in the morning. Let them know that you care about them, and that you are their friend. Following are two activities that have been successful in Myrtle Beach.

### Cookouts

A cookout is held each week alternating between two locations, one on the north and the other on the south end of the Strand. The cookout consists of a free meal, an opportunity to play volleyball or basketball, as well as a short devotional. It is best to have a place for the guards to sign in, so you have a record of attendance. The relaxed atmosphere provided at a cookout offers many exciting opportunities for ministry. Publicity for these cookouts is word of mouth during visitation, flyers handed out to the guards, and flyers sent to the various beach services that employ the guards. Cookouts in Myrtle Beach are now well established and quite popular among the guards from year to year.

### Worship Services

A relatively new aspect of the ministry is a lifeguard worship service. These young men and women work long hours, often seven days a week and do not have the opportunity to attend a traditional church service. Responding to requests from the guards, a weekly worship service has been established. These services are held in the evening, are very informal, and are usually held on the beach. They are led by various members of the staff.

These are just two examples of events that you can plan in a lifeguard ministry. There are many other structured and unstructured ways in which you can minister to these young men and women. Once again, ministry to lifeguards is centered on relationships. The philosophy is to earn their friendship and the right to share Jesus with them through meeting their needs.

## Sample Position Description: Lifeguard Ministry Leader

1. Contact and form relationships with Red Cross and beach service personnel on the Grand Strand.
2. Gather ideas and information of creative and attractive ways to minister to the lifeguards.

3. Evaluate existing lifeguard ministry.
4. Prioritize ministry needs.
5. Determine what personnel, material, and financial resources are needed to carry out the ministry opportunities.
6. Write ministry proposals. Describe projects, determine who will be responsible, time limits, responsibilities of church(es).
7. Encourage and enlist churches in the \_\_\_\_\_ Baptist Association to be involved in ministry areas.
8. Work cooperatively with the resort and US/C-2 missionaries of the association.
9. Assist in providing a plan of follow-up on professions of faith, recommitments, and those asking questions or interested in further contact.
10. Provide an annual report to the resort council of the Lifeguard Ministry and future ministry needs and opportunities.

Adapted from an article by James and Hannah Hanson in the *1993 National Resort Ministries Conference Notebook*. Used by permission.