

Ministry at Family Campgrounds

Baptist State Convention of North Carolina

Each year, locals and visitors fill the many federal, state, county, and city-owned parks and privately owned campgrounds all around the United States. Concerned Christians have the opportunity to provide a witness for Jesus through worship services, Bible study, children's activities, and other related ministries.

Who are the campers?

1. Senior adults.
2. Young families with small children-usually through sixth grade.
3. Families, sometimes with problems, who wish to bond together.
4. People with alcohol and prescription drug habits that cause family problems.
5. Special groups, like motorcyclists, go to certain campgrounds.

Who can minister on a family campground?

1. Adult men and women are the most needed ministers for a campground. Youth can be used as support, but an adult must be in charge.
2. An adult must have a positive attitude towards missions, feel a sense of call to ministry, and have a desire to minister in a mission setting. A woman who is perceived to spend all of her time with the men, or a man who is perceived to spend all his time with women, will not be successful.
3. Some people will not come to worship if a woman leads, while others would not be concerned. A qualified, cordial person who loves people, feels a call to minister through Jesus Christ, and prepares a good 15-minute sermon or devotional, will be accepted by most people. It is the personality, not gender that determines success.
4. The men and women should not overdress or dress suggestively. Dress is casual, yet neat and conservative. For the morning worship, open-collared shirts, slacks, and blouses are in good taste. Always abide by the campground rules.

Weekend campgrounds:

Usually campers arrive on Friday evening from 5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., and stay through Sunday afternoon. These campgrounds can be mountain, lake, beach, or local campgrounds. There is usually not much activity Monday through Thursday unless a holiday falls on those days.

Seven-day campgrounds:

Usually, these campgrounds have a fairly regular clientele all week. People arrive on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, and stay for part of or a full week. Another group follows, and the cycle goes on for a full summer. Usually these campgrounds are found at resort locations in the mountains and at the beach.

Overnight campgrounds:

Usually, these campgrounds attract campers who travel through or across the state. They arrive from 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon through late at night, and usually leave early the next morning.

Special Holidays and Family Campground Ministry

Special holidays during camping season are listed below. When holidays fall close to weekends, campers will take an extra day or so for a long weekend. These holidays are very important times to minister, as most campgrounds are full on holidays and holiday weekends. The area and the weather make a great difference.

Easter weekend
Memorial Day weekend
Fourth of July
Labor Day
Thanksgiving weekend
Christmas

Campgrounds are filled during most holidays. People with no family usually camp at Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. Many campgrounds have a covered dish dinner on those holidays. The beach season opens on Memorial Day weekend. Easter is a crowded time at the beach, the lake, and in the mountains. The overnight campgrounds are busy. Campgrounds in the mountains usually open later and are open through the time when the leaves change colors.

The family camping season

Many campgrounds open Easter weekend and close on the Tuesday after Labor Day. Mountain campgrounds are open from early June through late fall. Beach campgrounds open from Easter weekend through the fishing season. Lake campgrounds open as soon as boating season begins and close when the boaters leave. A few campgrounds are open for a 12-month season.

Beginning a Family Campground Ministry

1. If there is a family campground in your area, find out if a ministry is being done on the campground and if the owners or managers are happy with what is being done.
2. Discuss your idea about starting a ministry with your pastor.
3. Determine how much time you can give to the ministry. Remember that most ministry is done on the weekends and evenings.
4. Make an appointment with the manager or owner of the campground in order to talk about the possibilities of a ministry. From a financial standpoint, a ministry is a good selling point for a family campground. It proves the manager's desire to have a clean, quiet and safe campground. Find out the ideas the manager has about his or her needs.
5. Once the manager has given his or her consent for a ministry, determine what you realistically can do. This is done by contacting church performance groups, soloists, instrumentalists, puppet and drama groups, ladies craft groups, or recreation people. Remember, most managers would like only one person.
6. Go back to the manager with your plans for ministry. Remember, you are on his ground, so he needs to be a part of the planning process. A letter and a visit by the pastor to say thank you for allowing the church to be there is most appropriate.
7. Always do what you say you will do.

An ideal family campground ministry

The basis of any ministry is Sunday morning worship. From that base, you can do as many types of ministry as you have the people and time to perform. Remember, visit and involve the campers in as many types of activities as possible. This will give the minister and the sponsoring church or association credibility. Ministry types are as follows:

Sunday morning worship
Family evening programs
Personal visitation
Recreation
Nature
Historical
Fine arts

Sample ministries and how to do them

Sunday worship

- Start taped music 15 minutes before worship, or use another type of music for the prelude.
- Greet people as they come to the worship area.
- Start on time.
- Introduce yourself and tell who sponsors the ministry.
- Welcome the people to the campground and the worship service.
- Sing some familiar hymns first verse only.
- Lead in prayer.
- Read Scripture. Campers on Mission tracts are available from the North American Mission Board. Give one to everyone who comes. Conduct a responsive reading.
- Lead in prayer.
- Have special music or a dramatic reading.
- Do a 15-minute sermon, lesson or devotion.
- Close with a challenge for commitment.
- Advertise that you are available to talk after the service.
- Give an opportunity for campers to share in expenses by receiving an offering.
- Close with prayer for a safe trip home.
- Walk among the crowd and speak to as many people as possible.
- Go by the manager's office to thank him or her for allowing the service and tell him or her the results.

Visitation

- Visit all campsites in order to get to know the people and to tell them about Sunday morning worship. Saturday afternoon or evening is the best time.
- Wear a t-shirt, hat, or jacket that will identify who you are.
- Prepare a professional pamphlet to further identify the ministry and the sponsor. One page sheet of activities is not the best, but it will do. Visit the campsites in a friendly manner, and invite people to the worship service or activities if you have them planned. You will soon notice that the same people appear several times during the season. You will have an opportunity to make some sound relationships.
- There are times after a worship service in which you will be invited to a campsite. This usually means the person needs someone to listen or help give direction to a problem. You could be the only pastor the person knows.

Listening is a good technique. Do not let your head override your brain. It is better to refer someone to a professional counselor than to say the wrong thing.

Chaplaincy Ministry

Chaplaincy is essentially a one-on-one ministry. If you can be available as a chaplain to the campers, work out an arrangement with the manager or owner so that he or she can contact you as needed. Post your phone number at the phone booth or office desk, and in the pamphlet. Chaplains are not usually called often, but when you are contacted, it is a dire emergency. A chaplain should publish a telephone number where he can be located in case of emergency. Crises that may occur are heart attacks, accidents, and bad news from home. If the management agrees, a chaplain could stay near the office and talk to guests. Be friendly, but not so convinced you are right on every subject that you cannot listen to what others have to say. Pushing yourself onto others will hurt your ministry. Never stay in the office unless the management invites you.

Ministry Through History of the Area

Almost every area has a rich history that travelers are interested in, especially if it is related to them in a creative manner. Learn a particular segment of the history well enough to stand before the group and tell the story. The better you tell the story by using illustrations, different voice qualities, and even motions, the better the people will like it. An even greater means of communicating history is through drama. Use impromptu actors from the crowd or bring a special team. Locate a person who likes to tell the yarns of the area. Be sure to promote the storytelling hour to the people.

Recreation Ministry

This particular ministry is one that can take as much time as you have to give. Consult the manager before you begin any ministry or activity. A typical weekend program follows:

Friday, 8:00 p.m.

- Schedule a choir for youth, children, or adults.
- Schedule a storyteller for a campfire program.
- Schedule a quartet or instrumentalist.
- Conduct games or activities that will be fun for all ages and will introduce people to each other.
- Close the time with a three-minute devotion.

Saturday Morning

- Have crafts for children and adults.
- Lead nature walks.
- Lead games for children.
- Visit campsites.
- Teach juggling, magic, etc.
- Hide a treasure and organize a treasure hunt.
- Give out rules for a *critter race* and let children search for a critter.
- Organize a horseshoe tournament.

Saturday afternoon

- Conduct a watermelon slicing party.

- Conduct a Kool-Aid krash at a pool.
- Organize softball, volleyball, and horseshoe games.
- Conduct a *critter race*.

Sunday morning

- Conduct worship service as suggested earlier in this pamphlet.

Marketing the Ministry

The best ministry in the world will not be successful unless the people know it exists. There are positive ways to market your ministry. The end result is to introduce Jesus Christ to the people.

1. Print matchbook covers to introduce your worship services.
2. Put signs and posters on bathhouse doors to advertise activities.
3. Print handbills to be given to campers as they arrive for the weekend.
4. Use the public address system.
5. Personal contact is the best method to communicate your programs and your desire to minister to the needs of the people.

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Family Evening Programs (FEP)

Purpose: To provide quality, family entertainment in order to attract people, build ministry relationships, and draw people to Jesus.

The goals of a FEP are:

1. To bring families together.
2. To provide a relaxed atmosphere to build relationships with non-Christians.
3. To show Christianity as a positive experience, be excited and have fun.
4. To generate group involvement.

Family Evening Programs consist of pop music and oldies, folk songs, patriotic music, movie themes, show tunes, and various genres, of upbeat Christian music. Programs are developed along a theme such, as God's love, light, patriotism, friendship, the ocean or beach music, etc. Variety is the key since audiences will range in age from children to senior adults. Possible ingredients include vocal and instrumental music, puppets, clowns, solos, duets, ensembles, magic tricks, mime, comedy, drama and interpretive movement, and sign language.

While a theme is necessary, a storyline will not work. Audiences come and go as their time allows, so people who come in the middle of a program may lose interest and leave if they cannot follow the program. Because of this reality, no musicals are allowed.

FEPs offer free, quality entertainment for families in a resort setting. The target group is the unchurched. In order to attract and hold their attention, 50% secular/50% Christian split in content has been established as a rule. Be careful not to present the Christian selections somberly. Be excited and show that being a Christian is fun! Maintain vitality throughout the program, portraying Christianity as being enjoyable-or more so than the secular. Plan carefully and prayerfully in order to reach those God will bring your way.

Plan to conclude your program with your group dispersed among the crowd and ready for relational evangelism. Dave Bennett's book, *Keep Giving Away the Faith*, is an excellent resource for relational evangelism training and preparation.

The second FEP at Hunting Island State Park should incorporate the purpose and goals of a FEP, but not be a repeat of the previous program. Other suggestions include a watermelon cutting, campfire with s'mores, karaoke night, day camp with children leading the program, and another FEP with different music drama.

Helpful hints

Arrival and set-up, 6:30

- Arrive early enough at location to set-up, tune up, relax, canvass campground, and visit with early arrivals.

Program

- Plan programs to last 30 to 45 minutes.
- Plan for audience involvement in the program as much as possible.
- Plan for the ministry group to be among the audience sometime during the program, and at the conclusion-when the evangelism takes place.
- Give-aways are an audience pleaser.

- Contests, sing-alongs, or emcees can be fun for the crowd and group.
- Avoid individual introductions or lengthy verbiage at any time during the program.
- Avoid religious or denominational jokes or parodies.
- Use secular language and music verses language and music of Zion.
- Variety in content is good—puppets, clowns, mimes, drama, and choreography are suggested.
- Costumes need not be elaborate, but creative.
- Start and finish on time-7:30—8:15.
- Keep the FEP planned, moving, and lively

Equipment

- Plan for the elements. Sound systems need to be loud enough to overcome wind, waves, and other distracting sounds.

Evangelism

- Practice sharing testimonies without using churchy words, so you can do this throughout your time with Low Country Ministries.
- Be a witness corporately, and one-on-one with individuals

Overall

- Be professional, and come excited about sharing Jesus through quality family entertainment.

Have fun!