

# Ministry at Historic Sites and Settings

## Sam and Betty Anne Schlegel

Historic sites and settings attract a wide spectrum of tourists and other guests. People from all over the country and world visit historic areas about which they have studied or in which they have a special interest. From Washington, D.C. to the Alamo, from St. Augustine to Plymouth Rock, from Kitty Hawk to Pearl Harbor — visitors seek to experience history where it occurred and where it may be relived and interpreted by descendants of the original participants, as well as historians, entrepreneurs, and others.

Many historic places and festivals are regularly visited by school groups, scout troops, tour groups, and families on vacation. Diplomats and international business professionals often include a bit of history in their travels, and tourists from foreign countries come both as individual families and as large tour groups. Different ethnic and special interest groups are attracted to certain historic sites because of the relationship of those areas to the history of the particular group. Because of the educational and cultural importance of history in the lives of many people, this natural attraction to historic areas often makes flashy and hard-sell marketing less necessary than in those resort settings which have been developed solely as commercial enterprises. However, this has not kept a number of historic settings from being over-commercialized in efforts to bring in more tourist dollars.

Creativity in sharing the gospel is a key to effectively ministering in most areas and is particularly important in historic settings. Christians desiring to have a positive role in the life and structure of an historic community or event need to know how to relate to the people, policies, and political systems which are present. This may require doing things differently from some other mission projects. For example, one must understand the policies, guidelines, and operational standards established by the boards and agencies set up to preserve and protect the historic buildings, facilities, districts, and/or cultures in an area; and then be willing to conduct all ministry endeavors within the reasonable bounds of those rules and regulations. A knowledgeable approach to developing ministry strategies in historic settings will therefore take into consideration the documented history of the area or event, developments through the years, and the projected image of the setting.

Very often, the religious background and history of a site, area or event are important keys to establishing a present-day Christian presence and ministry there. Because of the strong influence that many different Christian groups had in our nation's history, the story of almost every historic setting in the United States includes some type of Christian involvement in one form or another. Year-round tours, seasonal re-enactments, anniversary celebrations, and even static monuments and displays can each contain elements of a Christian witness to the movement of God in the history of that place.

Therefore, unique opportunities abound for sharing the gospel in creative ways in historic settings with a varied array of people who are a part of history in the making. Christians will undoubtedly want to take part in such a dramatic opportunity.

### Why Be Involved?

- To demonstrate the love of Christ and show the limitless realm of God's concern to people in historic settings.

- To build relationships through which the love of God can be communicated in the context of historic areas.
- To share the gospel through verbal witness, Scripture distribution, music,drama, mime, etc.
- To meet human needs and personal aspirations with services and activities done in the name of Christ.
- To call out Christians in historic areas to a life of active witness in ministry.
- To establish an identity as followers of Jesus Christ who truly care about all people, even those persons who seem to be forgotten by history.

### How to Get Started:

#### LEARN ABOUT YOUR AREA —

Play tourist and discover what is going on. Seek information from chambers of commerce, tourist bureaus, governmental agencies, newspapers, etc. Find out about:

The historical background and development of your particular setting. Any past, present, and future events which have re-enacted, celebrated, or recognized the history of the site or area. The religious background of the site or event. The groups and individuals related to the preservation, upkeep, renovation, or promotion of the setting, and their sources of support. The desired image/reputation of the setting/event.

Who are the professionals, amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers that are involved in the event or activity. What regulations and rules might apply to signs, activities, clothing, structures, etc. The ethnic groups who are a part of the setting/event or who are attracted to it. The ongoing tours, guides, lectures, etc., in the area. Any political feelings and issues related to the historic site or setting.

#### DETERMINE WHAT IS NEEDED —

See what needs and opportunities for ministry exist.

Who can we help most effectively?

ORDER PRIORITIES ?

CONSIDER RESOURCES ?

DETERMINE MINISTRY FOCUS

### A Sampler of Ministry Possibilities

Where?

historic districts

buildings

monuments

battle sites

forts

lighthouses

ships

replicas

archeological sites

cemeteries/burial grounds

re-enactments

dramatic productions

patriotic celebrations  
national holidays  
anniversary celebrations  
historic festivals  
museums  
parks  
plantations/gardens  
bed and breakfasts

#### To Whom?

visitors/tourists/attenders  
spectators  
history buffs  
local people  
management  
organizers  
promoters  
volunteers  
participants  
re-enactors  
ethnic groups  
special interest groups  
business owners  
employees  
cessionaires

#### What Kinds of Ministries?

##### By Individual Christians:

- As a volunteer supervised by management: host, usher, guide, set up/break down crew, parking, ticket sales, programs, sanitation, area monitor
- As a regular employee of the site or settings: management, staff, attendant, etc.
- As a participant in a related event: performer, actor, re-enactor, tour guide, walking monologue, etc.
- As an employee of a independently-operated support group: concessionaire, security, parking, etc.

##### By a Church or Association:

- Street performances/witness: through “strolling” musicians and other performers in historic dress
- Entertainment: concerts, dramas, storytelling
- Children’s programs: day camping, recreation, story corners, craft corners
- Historic worship services: at special events, as an on-going part of the setting, during holiday seasons
- Historic Christmas caroling: in period dress, with music from historic eras

- Parade floats: providing a Christian interpretation of the parade theme, as well as demonstrating community involvement and concern
- Hospitality services: cold water, information, etc.
- Supplemental services and/or personnel: guides, interpreters, chaplains, crisis counselors, child care, housing bureau for visitors, parking lot attendants, traffic control, set-up/break-down/clean-up people, etc.

## BE CREATIVE!

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