

# Ocean Beach Ministry

## Florida Baptist Convention

*“When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”(Matt. 9:36-38, NIV)*

*An ocean beach is any area on the water’s edge that attracts sunbathers; watersports enthusiasts; seashell hunters — those looking for a good time.*

### Why Minister?

Ministry is needed in ocean beach areas because of the high concentration of people. Jesus’ mandate is to go everywhere teaching of Him. In this leisure setting where persons are relaxed, away from work and home responsibilities and reflective upon the gorgeous creation about them, sharing about Jesus is a natural.

### Relating in the World

As in every area of life, relationships are important in the leisure setting. The Christian must take the initiative to build meaningful relationships within the leisure community. A balanced relationship with resort personnel will open doors to ministries and build good relations between the church and community.

As you approach management, relate to *their* needs. Seek to gain an understanding of their goals and offer to help meet these through the services you can provide to tourists and employees. Avoid “church” language and spiritual clichés; speak their language so that a clear understanding exists. For example, offer a children’s day camp rather than Backyard Bible Club or a service rather than a ministry. Make a list of “church words” and translate them into everyday language. Be honest, but in the language they will understand. Be accepting, courteous and appreciative. Remember Christ’s admonition to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

### Steps in Beginning

- Elect a person, committee, or organization in the church to take leadership in this ministry.
- Survey the beaches in your area noting size, accessibility when most populated and group type frequenting the area.
- Talk with beach authorities, parks and recreation directors, aquatics directors or lifeguards, to determine services currently offered on site. Ask what needs are perceived for that location.
- Meet with the committee to brainstorm ideas for ministries to meet the needs.
- Determine materials, financial, and personnel resources needed to carry out the ministry.
- Write a ministry proposal describing the name of the project, to whom it is directed, time allotment, and the responsibilities of the beach authorities and the church.
- Make a personal visit with beach authorities to share the project proposal two to three months before the starting date for the ministry project.

- Recruit and train volunteers for the ministry project. Include witness training. Provide a list of “do’s and don’ts” for the ministry.
- Promote the ministry project at the beach as regulations will allow—perhaps with distribution of fliers, posters in local businesses, on radio or television, in local newspapers or with a message plane. Promotional materials should reflect quality, telling what, where, when and by whom.
- Implement the ministry project as planned. Provide supervision for the volunteers. Do everything that was promised to the authorities. Be flexible, always maintaining a positive attitude.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the ministry project. Ask feedback from the beach authorities and volunteers. Follow-up on any professions of faith or commitments to Christ.
- Write thank you notes to volunteers and beach authorities.

### Meeting the Needs

With each opportunity, determine the target group(s): children, families, young couples, older couples, singles, teenagers, concession workers, lifeguards, transients, or street people. Whether the group is made up of locals or vacationers may also need to be considered.

### Sand and Surf Clubs

Mission Backyard Bible Clubs (BBC) conducted in a beach setting have been coined Sand and Surf Clubs. The BBC or daycamping materials may be used with modifications for crafts, taking weather and wind conditions as well as sand underfoot into consideration. These can be conducted daily Monday through Friday for 1½ to 2 hours. Include parents in activities whenever possible. Always have adults ready to share with parents during or following club meetings.

### Worship Services

The beauty of the beach setting lends itself toward worship. Worship services should be planned on Sundays at a time suited to reaching the most people. A nice shaded area is excellent or a covered pavilion, if available. The location should be in a good traffic flow area, easily accessible to beachgoers. Leadership attire must be casual to encourage attenders to come-as-they-are.

Services should be 20 to 30 minutes in length while incorporating music, scripture and prayer. Creativity must be the key with joy and excitement always evident. No “invitation” should be given, instead inviting all to remain after the service and ask questions of what has been seen and heard. This service can be targeted as a satellite congregation and recorded as part of the Sunday School count as a mission outreach center for the church.

### Sunburn Unit

A booth or fun-wagon may be used as a sunburn unit. Liquids to drink and necessary medications should be provided. A nurse should always be on staff at this unit, with volunteers to aid and help in witnessing opportunities. A health kit or survival kit of some sort should be provided upon departure of each patient including a New Testament or Scripture portion with a tract and identifier for follow-up.

### Free Water Giveaway

A booth to provide ice water free to everyone can be a great witnessing venture for the beach. Keep tracts available for everyone who stops. Be careful that this does not conflict with neighboring businesses. Provide umbrellas and chairs, at least some shaded area, to allow a break from the heat. These will encourage visitors to remain for a time in order that someone may share the gospel with them.

### One-on-One Evangelism

On most public beaches, solicitation is not allowed, thus the giving away of materials is prohibited. One-on-one evangelism is permissible. Individuals or teams of two may stroll the beach and seek to start conversations that can be directed toward Jesus. A natural beginning is the beauty of God's creation. Be creative in your approach but natural and loving. Be willing to listen in order to earn the right to share. Genuine concern is all that will be tolerated in this setting. A good tool is Dave Bennett's book *Keep Giving Away The Faith*. Those who are bold enough to try this method are in for a special blessing.

### Entertainment

Free quality entertainment quickly draws a crowd on the beach. This can be in the form of musical ensembles, youth choirs, puppetry or drama. An associational or church creative arts team can lead out in this area. The performance should not be completely religious. In fact,  $\frac{2}{3}$  secular and  $\frac{1}{3}$  religious is a good proportion to maintain. Prepare persons to be ready to mingle with the crowd of observers and share Christ with them at the conclusion of the performance.

### Chaplaincy

A chaplain on the beach may be offered through the Parks and Recreation Department, or whoever manages the area. Lifeguards should be informed of the chaplain services available and should readily recognize the chaplain assigned. This requires exposure. Each chaplain needs to be seen on his/her beach as frequently as possible. This familiarity breeds relaxation for repeat local beachgoers and for the lifeguard staff and other management. If beach worship is not already in progress, the chaplain could be an open avenue for such as well as opening opportunities for entertainment, Bible study, evangelism, recreation, etc.

### Recreation

Recreation on the beach is limited only by imagination and the creativity of the Spirit. Sand sculpting may be used with a group as a conversation starter or as a contest. Volleyball games work well at times when the sand is not too hot. Ice water should be available to guests to encourage them to remain while giving an opportunity for sharing. Kite flying may be used as kites are made on the spot and given to those who come to watch. Make use of the time while they are flying the kite to share Jesus. Frisbee throwing or touch football are good crowd drawers, when beaches allow the use of balls and such. When these are prohibited, invisible football is an excellent curiosity builder. Beach runs or walks with age group divisions may be developed as daily or weekly on going activities or as contest events. Be creative! One can rarely be too bizarre in recreation choices at the beach.

### Sporting Events

Occasionally sporting events are held on the beach. These may include lifeguard competitions, triathlons, beach runs, kite flying contests or sailing competitions. Volunteers are always used at these events. Being a volunteer could open doors for future involvement in the event, as well as immediate opportunities for witness. Perhaps the event needs additional sponsors or free water and Gatorade to be distributed at the conclusion of the

competition. Make available possible resources to the competition director; being certain that quality follow-through will be provided as offered.

### Spring Break

Beaches are often frequented at Spring break time. Planning should be done for the masses. Any areas listed above may be offered in a concentrated form at this time, only in larger grander fashion as the numbers on the beach rise! Concentration should be given to one-on-one evangelism throughout the time. Be sure volunteers are trained well in advance.

### Special Services

#### HOT LINE FOR YOUTH —

Counselors need to be recruited and trained well in advance. Make available to counselors referral numbers for any situation beyond their capabilities. Publicize the phone numbers well through newspapers, on television, and the chaplain at all special events (especially during spring break).

#### REFERRAL OR RESOURCES FOR TRANSIENTS —

Many transients are on the beaches. Available resources and referral agencies, individual or otherwise, should be readily accessible to all leadership and volunteers in resort ministry. Remember, Jesus directs us to care for the whole man, feeding and clothing in His name, often before a gospel presentation will be heard. Actions do speak louder than words, as the old adage claims.

### Coffeehouse

First secure a location. Hours of availability and location must be well publicized. No fees should be involved, but beverages may be offered at cost. Make the area attractive and inviting to any and all who would desire to come. Provide games with time for sharing with one another. Being ready to share Jesus is a key. Recognize that this is *not* always verbal, even though it should be at every opportunity. Entertainment may be offered. Referral numbers should always be available to all who will attend by posting or handouts.

### Evangelism

The heart of leisure missions is evangelism. The leisure setting is secular. People's understanding of reality is what they can see and touch. Leisure evangelism is communicating in the vernacular the message of the Gospel to secular society. This requires an understanding of the hearer's thought patterns. Our words are interpreted according to his existing frame of reference.

Leisure evangelism involves being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and earning the right to be heard. Tourists or resort employees must realize that we as Christians care before they will be open to the Gospel. Personal openness, common interests and a listening ear help build trust in relationships.

The first step in building a witnessing relationship is to be friendly and sincerely care. Secondly, the Christian must be at ease or "laid back." Next, the Christian should listen to where the person is coming from — what do they believe and why? Once we've taken time to truly listen, the right to be heard has been earned. Then with a balance between urgency and sensitivity, the Christian shares his personal testimony. A low-keyed approach is preferable for leisure evangelism. The task is to get the Gospel to all who do not know

Christ, recognizing not every person is at the same level of preparedness. In obedience, we share the Good News, and the outcome is left to God.

### Summary

Prayerfully determine available resources and immediate needs in the area. Don't be afraid to start small. It is of utmost importance that integrity is *always* maintained. Whatever is promised must be fulfilled. Be careful to find the balance of *all* that can be done and done *well*. Good planning breeds success. Be over-prepared, anticipating all that could possibly occur. See the fields white for harvest and ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest field. Remember limitations exist only in lack of imagination and creativity. Pray for open eyes to see — then do it.

*“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’”*  
John 20:21b NIV

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