

RESORT MINISTRY 101 – RESORT/LEISURE MINISTRY HOW IT WORKS TODAY

By Jeff Wagner

Exploring evangelistic ministries with lifestyle populations, recreational/hobby enthusiasts, and resort/leisure settings.

Introduction:

What are your hobbies and where do you play and vacation? The answer to this question varies from person to person. To some a vacation is a relaxing week at a beach hotel while others it may be rock climbing in the Sierra Nevada mountains in California. Playing is also a personal choice from participating in weekend softball tournaments to photographing wildlife. People of North America strive to have fun and spend a lot of money on vacation, recreation and travel.

How do the resorts and tourism influence your community? When we think of resort/leisure settings we often think of Disney World, Las Vegas, Branson or Yellowstone. However, resort/leisure settings are everywhere. A vacation and leisure takes place in every community, the businesses and community leaders strive hard to attract people to your community.

Biblical Basis:

Jesus is born near an inn (Luke 2:7) Mary and Joseph were on a trip and needed to find a place to stay. They went to an innkeeper for assistance. Bethlehem was filled with guests and the hotels were full. Meeting the needs of strangers is a key element in resort/leisure ministries.

Good Samaritan used an inn (Luke 10:34) Meeting the physical needs of travelers and caring for them is part of resort ministry and partnering with business owners, government officials and others is biblical.

Entertaining “angels unaware” (Heb. 13:2) Churches do not see the need to reach out to resort/leisure visitors because they are not around long enough to benefit the church. However, as you minister to visitors and travelers you are making an impact on the Kingdom of God. In turn Christians mature as they reach out and share Christ with others.

Jesus uses examples of the outdoors to teach lessons of life. Jesus shared the mysteries of God and the power of a relationship with Him through a mustard seed, by walking on water, camping with his disciples, and teaching on a hill. Jesus was out where the people are so they could sense God’s creation all around them.

Resort/Leisure Settings:

There are missionaries and resort ministries in a variety of locations throughout North America. Campground ministries are an excellent location to engage people as they vacation and enjoy God's creation. Smoky Mountain Resort Ministries in Gatlinburg, TN has been conducting campground ministries for years. Hotels are another open door for intentional ministries such as the Kid's Clubs at the hotels in Orlando. Ocean beaches provide excellent opportunities to engage people as they play and relax by offering programs for children, life guard ministries, distributing water and sun screen. Resort ministries in Ocean City, MD, Gulf Shores, AL and Myrtle Beach, SC are a few examples of intentional evangelistic ministries that utilize the draw of the ocean beach to engage people with the gospel. Ski areas are natural draws for millions of people and also an excellent place for ministry by conducting mountain top worship services, giving cookies to lift operators and other employees and providing chaplain ministry for the area. Well established ski ministries are throughout Colorado known as Alpine Resort Ministries as well in Tahoe, CA, Big Sky, MT, Gatlinburg, TN, Cannan Valley, WV and many others. Toledo Bend, LA and Lake of the Ozarks, MO are examples of ministry around lakes and rivers. The beauty of our national parks attract millions of people annually and there are missionaries and churches engaging the visitors and staff in such parks as Yosemite, Grand Canyon and the Smoky Mountains. People not only go to beautiful locations for leisure and vacation they also attend events, fairs, festivals, sports competitions and theme parks. For example, in Lake Placid the resort ministry ministers to the athletes and fans of the annual Iron Man triathlon every year.

In every community people will gather in groups to participate in various hobbies and leisure activities. These groups take on personalities of their own with their own language, dress and customs. Some of these groups are bikers, golfers, equestrians, race fans, extreme sports enthusiast, hikers, surfers, hunters, fishers and many others. Examples of ministries that have intentionally focused on a lifestyle group are the evangelistic outreach to bikers during the Sturgis Bike Rally in South Dakota and Bike Week in Myrtle Beach, SC. By knowing the needs and dynamics of these groups open up the opportunity to share Christ by meeting their needs.

For ministry to take place the "crowd" of a resort/leisure setting needs to be considered as individuals. People in resort communities and around leisure lifestyle settings are varied. They include: year round residents, seasonal residents, families, single adults, internationals, winter residents, people on the fringe, boaters, lifeguard, vendors, officials, park service, businesses, event planners, employees (who often have multiply jobs) and government agencies. All of these people need to be considered when developing a resort/leisure ministry. Understanding, who they are? How do they impact the community? What attracts people? These dynamics will help to make a resort/leisure ministry relative to its setting.

Resort/leisure ministry is an exciting opportunity to make Christ known in communities that are vibrant and a lot of fun. Going to where the people are and make Christ known.