

Starting a Ministry for Special Events

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What is a special event?

A special event is any attraction, exposition, sporting event, or happening that brings people together for entertainment, education, competition, enjoyment, or leisure. The variety of events might include state or county fairs, carnivals, rodeos, craft fairs, art/music festivals, parades, agricultural expositions, historical reenactments, flea markets, seasonal/ethnic/seafood festivals, pioneer days, trade shows, and sports events.

All of these special events, fairs, and festivals represent places where people gather in large masses and have a variety of needs. Therefore, the Christian community has a great opportunity to establish ministries by meeting those physical and spiritual needs in the marketplace.

One example of meeting those needs is the story of a woman who participated in a ministry to a sports event in Indianapolis, Indiana. Dressed as a clown, she distributed Bibles on the streets of Indianapolis. Sometime later, she went to work in the recreation room of an apartment complex. One evening, a young man came in and said he had heard that a Christian was working there, and he wanted to talk to her about the Lord. He had a Bible with him, and as she shared the gospel with him, he prayed to receive Christ. Afterwards, she asked him where he got the Bible. He explained that a clown had given it to him downtown. She was the clown.

As this story illustrates, churches need to “break out” and become involved in ministries through special events, fairs, and festivals in the marketplaces of America. These ministries can make a great impact in communities by meeting physical needs and sharing the good news of Christ with a hurting world.

How do we start a special events ministry?

Step 1: Understand the event and its setting.

In order to put together an effective ministry for a special event, you must first know what is going on at the event.

- Experience the event as a participant. Look for unmet needs and needed services. Take notes on what you see, giving particular attention to opportunities for ministry.
- Find out who is there. Are they visitors, customers, local people, exhibitors, performers, organizers, promoters, employers, vendors, managers, security?
- Find out why they have come. Are they there for entertainment, leisure, business, pleasure, education, or competition? Are they finding what they are seeking?
- Understand the people at the event in terms of who they are— age, marital status, economic class, employment, ethnicity, religious orientation, etc.

Step 2: Identify needs and aspirations.

It is essential that you understand the needs and aspirations of the people with whom you minister—what they need and what they are seeking.

- Interview the promoters and management of the event, local chamber of commerce, business associations, service clubs, tourist bureaus, local governmental agencies such as law enforcement, and other service providers. These can help identify met and unmet needs.

- Use a survey to discover those details of the event which you need to consider in defining your ministry: “owner,” purpose and nature of the event, target group, etc.

Give careful consideration to the various groups who will be at the event. For example, affluent people may not have obvious needs, but they are still seeking after something. What is it people want? How is that already being met? Is it?

Step 3: *Develop a mission statement.*

Include in it the reason and vision for this ministry. Tell who will do what for whom. Define the broad scope of the ministry and include an agreement to carry it through by all parties involved. Use this mission statement as basis to identify specific ministry objectives.

Step 4: *Envision the ministry.*

Brainstorm possible ministry activities. Dream big and don't limit your visions. Research similar projects. Be creative! Consider the following possibilities:

- Booths/exhibits*—diaper-changing area; booth-sitting service for vendors; care packages for vendors (cookies, candy, snacks, etc.); information (maps, literature, Bibles); cups of cold water and a place to sit down; first aid; health screening (glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol checks); crisis counseling.

- Hospitality center/van/trailer*—directions to events and local maps; hospitality register; emergency hot line; crisis/spiritual counseling; literature, tracts, Bibles; bed and breakfast information; interpreters to language groups; deaf ministry; t-shirts, buttons, badges, pins; free refreshments; restaurant providing soup, sandwiches, desserts; creative arts groups; large-screen television; and tourist information.

- Creative arts presentations*—clowns; puppets; illusion; mime; vocal groups; handbell choirs; drama groups; instrumental groups; parades.

- Children's activities*—good-time wagon; music; drama; clowns; puppets; illusion; face painting; Bible storytelling; games; day-care service; and fun sporting events.

- Campground/hotel ministries*—worship services; family evening programs; Backyard Bible Clubs; day camps; sightseeing tours.

- Chaplains*—counseling in crisis and spiritual matters, marriage, drug/alcohol/ physical abuse, runaways, missing children, accidents, and deaths.

Step 5: *Develop a ministry design.*

Elect a committee and brainstorm ideas. Put together a written ministry proposal to provide a foundation for further planning.

- Set priorities.* Decide on the most pressing needs. Who can you help most effectively? What will you do first? What one or two projects are most needed? Be sensitive to ethnic groups. Be service-oriented. Abide by rules and regulations. Be flexible.

- Determine your resources.* Determine personnel, facilities, equipment, support, supplies, and finances needed for ministry objectives. Develop relationships with appropriate leaders. Be realistic in evaluating your resources.

•*Plan the actual ministry.* Reflect the overall ministry objectives and mission statement in your goals and action plans. Earn others' respect. Use other ministry models. Develop strong supervisors. Develop clear job descriptions or duties. Structure the ministry with quality and integrity.

Step 6: Prepare ministry activities.

Recruit and train volunteers. Obtain the resources needed for ministry activities. Develop ongoing logistical support.

Step 7: Carry out ministry plans.

Develop a spiritual focus. Be sensitive to people. Have quality programming. Demonstrate openness and flexibility, and show supportive supervision.

Step 8: Follow-up and long-range planning.

Evaluate the ministry, and ensure that promises are met. Share the results of your work with all involved. Make plans for future ministries.

What leadership is needed?

Start with the local committee and then gather local volunteers from churches and the community. The local Baptist association and state convention are additional resources for volunteers. The North American Mission Board can provide both short-term volunteers (student summer/semester missionaries, Innovators, Sojourners, mission youth groups, SPOTS teams, individual adults, adult groups) or long-term volunteers (Mission Service Corps and US/C-2 missionaries). Be sure to provide adequate training and resources for volunteers and supervisors.

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