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Churches Taking Their 'Good News' To Local Beaches, Campgrounds

BY SUSAN USHER

Informal worship opportunities are on the increase across the South Brunswick Islands, as more local Christian churches reach out to serve resort areas during the peak summer season.

Their outreach may involve the fellowship of kite festivals, volleyball games and concerts, the subtle messages of puppet shows and musicals, or informal worship or Bible study surrounded by the natural beauty of the ocean strand, or overlooking a marsh or waterway.

Most resort area ministries are come-as-you-are sessions conducted at picnic tables or with worshippers seated on beach towels or in lounge chairs, often clad in swimsuits or shorts.

"The whole idea of resort and leisure ministry is to try to present the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ, to people who live, work or visit in resort areas," says

the Rev. Douglas Huff, pastor of First Baptist Church of Oak Island and a resort ministry leader for the Brunswick Baptist Association.

In cooperation with the staff of the N.C. Baptist Assembly on Oak Island, the church coordinates an 8:30 a.m. Sunday worship service on the beach at the Long Beach Cabana.

Resort and leisure ministries typically don't compete with more formal worship opportunities available in the same community, said Huff.

"We're presenting a worship opportunity to people who don't attend a regular church service, either because of their work schedule, or because they're on vacation and don't want to change out of casual clothing, or whatever. It works into their schedule nicely."

"At this point we're doing more for visitors than for local people with this ministry," said Huff. "But by doing things for visitors we're getting to know some of the people who work in the resort industry. As it builds and we get more local church people participating we'll be able to get more involved with others in the resort communities."

Association member churches are also coordinating services at two other locations: the "Little Brown Hut" at Campground By The Sea at Holden Beach, 8:30 a.m. Sunday, and Sea Mist Camping Resort at Brick Landing, 8 a.m. Sunday. The Association eventually wants to be supporting outreach at eight different resort locations in the county.

In addition to season-long weekly services, the Brunswick Baptist Association is working with the denomination's Home Missions Board to bring a variety of resort ministry teams to the area. This summer seven teams

will work in the county for up to a week at the time, coming from across North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia to share their talents.

"We just pair them up with a local church, give them any help we can and let them go to it," said Huff. "They're bringing anywhere from 12 to 30 people with them to do things

like puppet ministry, concerts, Backyard Bible Clubs, recreation and other activities on the beaches and in campgrounds.

"We've got one group of 30 to 40 singles that will be coming from Cary in August to work however we can use them."

Other groups are comprised mainly of teenagers, with their adult leaders.

"Some will be singing, some witnessing, some doing community surveys," added Bill Smith, the association's missions director. "Others will be miming or clowning."

"We're going to have a lot more going on in the

future, with as many as 15 groups coming," said Smith. "We're just getting cranked up this year."

Baptists aren't the only denomination reaching out. In the South Brunswick Islands area, two nondenominational chapels and services on the strand at all three local beaches also offer informal worship, each averaging several hundred worshippers each week.

The Holden Beach Chapel, which offers Sunday school and worship at 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. respectively every Sunday, grew out of an informal worship service begun on the island many years ago. This year services continue through the Christmas season at the nondenominational chapel on Rothschild Street. A different minister takes the pulpit each Sunday in exchange for a week of R & R at the beach.

That same pastor-of-the-week arrangement serves the Ocean Isle Beach Chapel, which offers an 8:30 a.m. service on the strand just west of the pier and an 11 a.m. service at the chapel on Second Street across from the town hall.

The Rev. Lester Dattler, pastor of Shallotte Presbyterian, conducts one of the area's longest-standing resort ministries—a worship service on the Ocean Isle Beach strand each Sunday. Coffee, doughnuts and fellowship at 7:30 a.m. open worship at the site off West First Street between the Duneside Drive and Driftwood Drive beach accessways.

Calabash Presbyterian Church is offering, for the third season, worship on the strand at Sunset Beach each Sunday at 8 a.m. between the gazebo and the pier, led by the Rev. Francis M. Womack Jr., pastor.

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