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Introduction

While this resource proposes to offer enough information to “get a good start,” it in no way pretends to be a complete textbook for the planning and carrying out of a meaningful recreation/sports ministry.

What we do here is this: offer a brief look at the reason for recreation/sports ministry as a vital church ministry, show basic approaches to the organization and administration of the recreation ministry in a church, suggest fundamental approaches to the training of leaders in a recreation ministry, provide a sampling of activities for a year’s program of recreation, and list some resources which the reader and other leaders can use to develop further the church’s recreation/sports ministry into an in-depth and permanent ministry of a local congregation.

This piece was originally done by Frank Hart “Pogo” Smith a true man of God and pioneer in relational evangelism who has since gone to be with the Lord. We are indebted to him and his love for people and ministry.

Thanks Pogo!

John Garner
Rationale for Recreation/Sports Ministry

The Christian knows God as creator of all things. When one becomes a Christian, that person is born again—or to put it in another term—re-created. It is therefore interesting to note that re-creation and recreation are the same base word. As one looks toward recreation as a ministry in a local church, one must look to the God of creation and re-creation as its author.

Recreation and Sports Ministry Defined:

Recreation/Sports: Any competitive/non-competitive activity or action that takes place during the leisure time of a group or an individual.

Ministry: Helping people understand their relationship with God, his daily role in their lives and their need to move from where they are to where they need to be in a right relationship to Him.

Combining the two one will come up with the following definition: Recreation and Sports Ministry: Activity that takes place during leisure time with the stated purpose or intention of helping people become aware of their need for a relationship to God, his daily role in their lives, and their place in His (Kingdom) work.*

Recreation/sports includes sports, fitness/wellness, crafts, social activities, camping/day camping, retreats, continuing education, and social events—be it at a community center, a boys’ club, a YMCA, or a church. The church’s ministry of recreation/sports has a plus of the “Christ distinctive” hat must intentionally be included; That is a desire to develop relationships and use that recreation/sports to share the message of salvation and to in order win persons to Christ and to lead those who know Him to grow in Him!

Luke 2:52 says “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.” Recreation and sports ministers to the whole man—physically, mentally, spiritually, socially. This approach to the abundant life in Christ is at the heart of a ministry using sports and recreation.

In looking at the purposes of recreation/sports ministry, one can see seven meaningful approaches:

• Recreation/Sports Events are gathering places for people—Because people are comfortable with recreation and sporting events they naturally will gather at these events. Who isn’t familiar with the crowds who attend basketball and football games?
Festivals of all kinds draw huge crowds of people. People understand the nature and action of recreation events. They may not understand what goes on in a church worship service, but they know what happens at a basketball game. By offering recreation and sporting events the church has a non-threatening avenue to attract people. Parents will bring their children to the “Fourth of July Extravaganza” which features family oriented activities, fun, food and perhaps fireworks. This is a natural way for the church to introduce itself to the community. This would be an example of a church based event to impact the community.

Other gathering places are sporting events – amateur and professional. Churches are taking the example of Jesus and “going where the people are.” Often helping event professionals by offering to do “anything that would be helpful” they are doing behind the scenes work – parking lot attendees, runners or errands, office work, etc. Churches are endeavoring to be the salt and the light in the world. Offering to be helpful, hoping for a chance to share the gospel at events, large and small.*

- **Recreation/Sports ministry is a channel of service and support to the entire church**—Helping the church develop and deepen relationships between it members and non-members alike is one way the sports and recreation ministry supports the church. This ministry also seeks ways to funnel or move those that participate in a recreation or sporting activity into the mainstream of church life. Hopefully active members will live such attractive lives in front of marginal members and non-members that they will be attracted to the teaching and worship ministries of the church either by specific invitation or interest generated through recreation and sports events.

- **Recreation and Sporting Events: bridging cultural and racial barriers, building relationship**—Sports is one of the most, if no the most “spoken” universal languages. Every country, every culture plays sports. Christians who use these tools find open doors and multiple opportunities to share the gospel with people from around the world. Opportunities abound in America to use sports to reach people. Many churches are hosting sports camps/clinics in their neighborhoods or taking teams on the road to play in prisons – being intentional to share the gospel as they go. People will gather for the event. People will listen to the players’ testimonies afterward. People will respond to the message of salvation shared in a genuine way.

- **Recreation is a catalyst in outreach**—A catalyst is a compound added to a chemical that causes the chemical to change its molecular structure, while the catalyst remains the same. As a catalyst, recreation and sports activities open doors, and enable a
church to reach out into a community in non-threatening ways. Relationships are developed and lives are changed with intentionality of ministry action.

- **Recreation/Sports is a vehicle for ministry and mission action**—A group of folks go do sports camps in order to share the gospel. The group of college students ministers on the beaches during spring break—with pancake breakfast, ultimate Frisbee™ games and free van rides. A group takes a game wagon equipped with a basketball, snow-cone machine, and books to read ministers in the inner city. They draw a crowd, play games, enjoy refreshments and share the gospel. All of these are examples of recreation/sports used as ministry in mission settings.

- **Recreation/Sports Ministry offers an avenue for the church to gain visibility in the community**—Churches who use this tool are finding ways to make their presence in the community known. One church wanted the community to know: Who they were and where they were in case someone ever had a need they might know who to turn to. They decided to do a large event. They involved the entire church. They involved businessmen in the community. They advertised in every media outlet they could think of. They moved church form Sunday to Saturday so the event would afford the best opportunity for people to attend. When the event took place, they had 30,000 people on their church grounds – in a part of the country that in not known for church attendance! They gained visibility in the community that day. Any church can do this, maybe not on that scale, but done with intentionality, any church can use sports and recreation to gain visibility in there community. This is possible because of our leisure oriented culture – events help gain visibility as people respond. This has implications on the quality of the events and there perceived value to people.

- **Recreation is a tool for teaching**—A coach uses terminology of the sport to get across a vital truth of scripture. A hiking affinity group uses a compass to show how the Word of God gives direction in one’s life. A boy’s mission group plays a game, then sits down to discuss how that particular game made them feel as they won and as they lost and what is the biblical view on the ethics of winning and loosing.

- **Offers a way to “abundant balanced life.”**—People are looking for something to fill the void in their lives. As an open group Ministry Teams strategy, recreation and Sports Ministry is often the “first touch” in a person’s life with the church. This ministry area offers a way to develop a relationship with people and to introduce them to the life of the church and a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I have come that they might have life and have it in abundance.” John 10:10 HCSB
A church sponsors a marriage enrichment retreat, and a couple pledges anew their love for each other. A series of after-church fellowships aids in the healing of a rift in the congregation. A shy young man finds meaning in his life for the first time through participation in a wilderness hiking experience. The abundant life is available to everyone and recreation/sports ministry can be a tool to help people find it.

- **Recreation/Sports Ministry is a Tool for teaching leadership skills**—Helping people develop leadership skills often starts with them leading things they are familiar with; coaching a team, leading an exercise class, teaching a crafts class etc. With the proper training and motivation, leadership and ministry skills are developed that can be used later on in a committee, teaching a bible study or in other leadership positions with in the church. This is a part of the Recreation/sports Ministry Team’s strategy of multiplying ministers.

- **Recreation/Sports Ministry is an environment for fellowship**—Recreation and sporting events provide informal times of interaction. This leads to a deepening of relationships between participants. These events often are held in a “non-religious” setting (basketball court, party, camping etc) thus putting any guests at ease. As fellowship is strengthened and relationships are developed, doors are open for witness and ministry. Between believers, fellowship is the foundation upon which to build respect, unity and loyalty in the church. Dr. T. B. Maston professor of social ethics in his book, *A Handbook for Church Recreation Leaders* wrote in 1937, “Churches need to promote play because of what it can contribute to the church as an institution. Play builds the spirit of friendliness and good fellowship. It unifies the group and contributes to a sense of solidarity and loyalty. . . It (play) erases artificial, superficial differences and divisions in the group.

**Organization**

Now that recreation and sports ministry is a real possibility for any church, how do you go about getting organized for that ministry?

**First: The Church Shows Support**—If recreation/sports ministry is to be an officially recognized ministry of a any church, the church must give tangible evidence that it is behind this work and even vote to do so. This action finds the staff, leadership and congregation saying that it endorses the ministry and will provide funding through the budget.
Second: Designated Someone to Be Responsible—This person may be an existing staff member to oversee this new area of ministry, or an interested lay person who will serve as committee chairperson. For chairperson, the nominating committee/ministry team committee should present the name of a man or woman who: (1) loves the Lord, (2) is a member of the church, (3) sees the potential of a ministry of sports and recreation, and (4) is dedicated to the task of intentional ministry through sports and recreation.

When the program grows to need paid personnel to supervise a facility or programming, these persons would be called as staff ministers and given recreation/sports ministry duties to oversee.

Third: Elect a ministry team/committee—It is vital that the church elect a committee in the same manner as other church committees/teams. The group should be made up of interested persons to serve with and advise the recreation/sports staff member and/or ministry team leader. Have a wide representation of interests and ages from various groups in the church (for example: a parent, a senior adult, single adult or a deacon/elder etc.).

Fourth: Conduct Surveys

People survey: Conduct a survey within the church’s membership to see what the people want to do, what they’re now doing, and who can provide leadership. A sample survey is available in the book: Recreation and Sports Ministry Impacting Postmodern Culture or online at www.lifeway.com/recsports.

Facilities survey: The committee also will want to survey the church property to determine multiple uses of existing buildings and grounds. For example, what room could be set up for crafts or as a temporary game room with storage for tables? Can volleyball standards be placed on a parking lot or grassy area?

Community Survey: The committee also needs to become aware of available city, county, state, and national recreation facilities, as well as parks, gymnasiums (city, school, private), and all other facilities that might be rented or borrowed by the church to allow the recreation/sports ministry to function.

The Ministry Team/Committee Work—Once the surveys have been taken and tabulated, members of the committee/ministry team can go to work.
The chairperson works with the church staff in administering the overall recreation/sports ministry (planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and evaluating). The chairperson person presides at all meetings of the staff or ministry team/committee. The Recreation and Sports Ministry Team serves as a policy making and guiding body to the staff or other person responsible for the ministry. They meet regularly to see that the ministry is on track with overall church vision and direction and that calendaring, budgeting and ministry objectives are being met. These people should be persons who have a keen interest in recreation and sports ministry. Depending on church policy, they need to serve at least two and possibly three years on a rotating basis so that new people can rotate on the ministry team/committee and more that a number of experienced folks remain to bring a sense of past direction and history to be passed along.

You may enlist coordinators to be responsible for specific interest/ministry areas or groups. Enlist these for one year and repeat as long as effective. Ministry team/Committee members may serve as coordinators. If, however, your church rotates members, you may lose a good coordinator. Add different areas of program as the need dictates and as personnel are found to lead in the various categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Areas</th>
<th>Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camping/Outdoor Ed</td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness/wellness</td>
<td>Special Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>Singles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cont. Education</td>
<td>Senior Adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
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</tbody>
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The coordinators work with the Ministry Team to plan activities in their specific areas. They make calendar and budget recommendations to the recreation/sports ministry team/committee. They also serve as consultants when specific groups need their help. (For example: If the women’s ministry is having a Mother-Daughter Banquet, the social coordinator would be available to give advice, but not to be in charge of the event.) The coordinators meet with the committee/ministry team to make recommendations about their areas.

The meetings of the Recreation/Sports Ministry Team/Committee should occur on a regular basis, at least quarterly. The time will be decided by the ministry team itself.

The planning process should include the entire team. The budget, as a ministry
planning tool, becomes a vital concern of the ministry team/committee. Coordinators should be informed about budget possibilities for their areas.

IV. Training

In order to have an effective ministry of recreation, a church must have trained leaders. The initial training session for all members of the recreation staff or committee should be a class study of Recreation and Sports Ministry Impacting Post Modern Culture by John Garner

Suggested Agenda for Study of Recreation and Sports Ministry . . . Book

Time: 5 hours
First Hour: Chapter
Second Hour: Chapter 5
Third, Fourth, Fifth Hours: Rest of the book

Make sure everyone understands the concept of being intentional about sharing the gospel using recreation and sports as a ministry tool.

Other Resources—The same general agenda can be given to classroom study of the other books which are a part of a continuing education process in this area of ministry. To see what LifeWay offers go to www.lifeway.com/recsports and look at downloadable resources.

Varieties of Training Sessions—These studies can be done in one session—at the church on a Saturday or in a retreat setting. Another method is to do the study one hour at a time for the appropriate length of time on a chosen evening or day of the week. One may also choose to schedule the training as part of a leadership training school where persons come for an hour or so each evening for four or five days.

Individual Study—Many books/resources on the recreation/sports ministry section of lifeway.com may be downloaded and studied for little or no cost. Go to www.lifeway.com/recsports to find out what is available.

V. Program

Balanced programming for all ages (preschool to Sr. Adults) is the key to success. Programming is what keeps people coming back for more. Be sure you balance the programming for all ages in all areas of interest. Do not let a ministry team member who
likes or dislikes of any activity overload the ministry in any one direction or age group. The survey (mentioned earlier) should give you good information as to what types of programming your community and church will respond to.

The recreation/sports ministry staff or ministry team/committee will probably plan many church wide activities and will assist the organizations in planning many more. As you plan, work closely with the church leadership and staff to avoid conflict in dates.

The following are programming suggestions by the month and by organizations to trigger your imagination. Adapt these and other ideas to your own needs and have a great year of recreation ministry in your church.

THROUGH THE CHURCH YEAR

**October**

1. Fall crafts fair
2. All-church fall family fellowship
3. Basketball/volleyball ministry organization/promotion and training
4. After-game fellowships (football)
5. Senior adult foliage tour
6. Retreat for sports missions training.

**November**

1. Youth Thanksgiving breakfast
2. All-church talent show
3. Hayride for all ages
4. Stewardship dinner
5. Upward basketball/promotion and sign-up

**December**

1. All church Christmas party
2. Missions basketball tournament
3. New Year’s Eve Bash!
4. Basketball and volleyball games
January
1. New aerobics/exercise classes
2. New crafts classes
3. Upward Basketball league begins
4. Everybody’s birthday party
5. Summer Camp/Day camp planning

February
1. Sweetheart banquet for adults
2. All church Valentine Fellowship
3. Begin follow up plan for sports leagues
4. Continuing Education Classes begin
5. Begin softball/spring sports promotion for all ages

March
1. Fish fry for men’s ministry
2. Retreat for college students
3. Upward sports award night
4. Adult sports leagues follow up
5. Senior adult fellowship
6. Spring Children’s sports program promotion and sign up – soccer, softball etc

April
1. Easter drama
2. Beginning of spring sports
3. Income tax helps seminars
4. Retreat for married young adults
5. Summer Camp/Day Camp staff training

May
1. Family retreat/camp out
2. Ending of spring fitness/wellness classes and follow up
3. All church Picnic
4. Promotion and signups for summer sports
5. Health fair for all ages

**June**
1. Preschool play days begin
2. Picnic in the park
3. Recreation at VBS
4. Day Camp
5. Adult summer sports leagues
6. Sports missions – local or away

**July**
1. Senior adult retreat
2. All-church watermelon feast
3. Day Camp
4. Backyard fellowship
5. Fun Run or Bike Hike

**August**
1. Senior adult day camp
2. Sign ups for fall craft, fitness and cont. Ed classes
3. Back to school bash for kids
4. Golf tournament
5. Sign ups and promotion for fall sports leagues for all ages

**September**
1. Retreat for new members of recreation/sport ministry staff/ministry team members
2. All-church county fair (begin church year)
3. Support for community fall festival
4. Begin fall programming
CHURCH MINISTRY ORGANIZATIONS AND RECREATION/SPORTS MIN.

**Sunday School/Small Groups**
1. Small group (affinity group) organization (Example: motorcycle group meets twice a month for fellowship, bible study and ministry)
2. Provide social event helps and ideas to SS/Small group leaders
3. Helps with retreat planning for all ages

**Discipleship**
1. Leadership development for recreation/sports ministry leaders is ongoing preparing them for service as bible study and organizational leadership roles
2. Retreat for training leaders to be effective in ministry and evangelism as they lead in an area of passion

**Woman’s Ministry**
1. Mother-Daughter banquet
2. Mission action helps
3. Women’s retreat recreation programming
4. Self defense seminars
5. Women’s health/wellness issues seminars

**Men’s Ministry**
1. Father-Son campout
2. Men’s Fraternity Retreat
3. Mission action: Build Habitat for Humanity Home
4. Hunting/fishing outreach trips

**Marriage and Family**
1. Family nights where families interact with each other as they play together
2. Family Retreat/Camp/Campout
3. “This Is Us” family fellowship – each family displays items that represent their individual and family interests
4. Family Talent Show – by families, for families about families
5. Parenting seminars as part of continuing education seminars

There’s much more your church can do!

VI. Resources

You say you’re ready to get started and all you need is help? Help is on the way!

ON WWW.LIFEWAY.COM/RECSPORTS—A robust offering of information and helps is available on www.lifeway.com/repsports. These downloadable resources, web casts, blog entries, articles and training information is available 24/7.

FROM LIFEWAY CHRISTIAN STORES—LifeWay Christian Stores offers a wide variety of books and training resources for all ages. Visit one of their stores or go online to place an order at www.lifewaystores.com.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES—Every year LifeWay Recreation and Sports Ministry makes training available for recreation/sports ministry leaders in various types of meetings all over the country. Some of these are:

- **REC LAB**—For paid staff members their spouses and ministry team members
  REC LAB is the oldest and premier recreation and sports ministry training conference in the world. Check www.lifeway.com/events to find out where and when the next REC LAB will be held.

- **Summer Conferences**—LifeWay offers recreation and sports ministry training at LifeWay Conference Centers in conjunction with various ministry emphasis weeks. Check www.lifeway.com/events to dates and locations.

- **Regional Seminars**—Regional training conferences are held in churches around the country at various times of the year. Check out www.lifeway.com/repsports to see if a training session is coming to a church near you.

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