

QUICKSTART: MISSION ROLE

Welcome! Thank you for trying out the Mission Role in your group! We want to equip you to do well, and pray that through your service and leadership your group becomes a place that welcomes non-Christians, and your members are missionaries in their lives – bringing light wherever they go.

WHY DO WE EMPHASIZE MISSION?

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." – Matthew 28:19-20

"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.'" – John 20:21

"You shall be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." – Acts 1:8

Mission is why the church exists. Jesus, our Lord, was the first missionary – he left heaven and its comforts to come to earth, be with us, experience what we do, and ultimately to save us. He has called us to go be his light to the world – to share the gospel, and to be a part of his grace saving and renewing lives. This is done in both our words and our deeds of love to the world around us.

PERSONAL GOALS FOR A ROLE HOLDER

1. Leaders Go First. Whichever material you choose to lead your group through, please do it yourself first. This accomplishes many things: a) you're only asking others to do something you have done yourself; b) you may identify something that doesn't make sense, or work, or fit with your group before asking everyone to try it – and you have time to adapt; and c) you can present the material with a personal example as appropriate to help those in your group get an idea of how the practice plays out.

2. Think 'Making Outsiders Insiders.' Just as Jesus left the comforts of his reign in heaven to come to us, identify with us, and make a way to bring us to God, we are called to give up our comforts for the sake of including others. Your goal is to see your group become a place where non-Christians could feel comfortable, and to help focus members of the group on the opportunities to share the gospel with people in their lives and who come to group. The goal is to see people join God's family, to become insiders to his family, rather than outsiders.

3. Group Ownership. As a role holder, you are not responsible for the group in the way that the Community Group leader is, but you can provide a lot of needed support for the leader. Rather than waiting on the leader to initiate or guide prayer within your group, you can help by leading here. By leading one of the included mission discussions or activities during group, you can expand the horizons of your group to love and serve the community at large, and experience the joys of following Jesus' example of missionary. Your collaboration with the other role holders and leader will form a strong team to focus your group on loving and knowing non-Christians, and seeing those blossom into opportunities to share the gospel and seeing others come to know Jesus.

MISSION TOOL #1: EVANGELISTIC QUESTIONS & CONVERSATIONS

For the majority of us, most of our time week-in and week-out will *not* be spent with other Christians – in church, community group or otherwise. Our schools and workplaces are filled with people of various beliefs and worldviews. For most of us, our biggest opportunity for mission is in our daily lives rather than on Sundays or group nights.

But how do you go from just being someone's buddy at school or work and sharing a joke here or there to someone with an opportunity to share the gospel in a relationship-driven way?

One tool is asking good questions. Jesus used questions all the time to draw people out regarding the things that mattered most to them, and their deeper questions about God and life. A fortunate thing is that we live in a time when people are generally comfortable with the idea of spirituality on a vague level, so they tend to not be offended if asked a spiritually-oriented question.

Here are some questions you could ask:

1. Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? (How? How did you come to believe what you believe? What are your beliefs based on?)
2. What do you think Christianity is? (How did you come to think this about Christianity?)
3. Do you believe in an after-life? What do you think it will be like? Who will be there? Why do you think the after-life will be this way?
4. Who has most influenced what you believe spiritually? Why them?
5. In your opinion, who is/was Jesus?
6. What do you think is the meaning of life?
7. What, in your opinion, is a good life?
8. Have your views on religion changed over the years? How?
9. If you could ask God one question, what would it be?
10. How do you deal with disappointment, rejection, stress, or loss? Is it effective?
11. What makes Christianity seem irrelevant to regular life?
12. What do you think is the biggest thing wrong with the world? How would you fix it?
13. What is your biggest hope for the world? Do you think it could be accomplished? How?

While it's possible that asking one of these questions could lead to a time where you are asked to share your faith, it's more likely that the conversation is really for you to understand your non-Christian friend's beliefs with more respect and compassion. If their description of Christianity is a religion of rules and judgment, no wonder they don't want any part! These conversations can guide your prayers for your friend, and make in-roads to future conversations where your friend may be seeking God himself, and you may be the friend to introduce them.

ACTIVITY: Give the list of spiritual questions to each person in your community group. Ask each member to ask one non-Christian friend one of the questions this week – and to report back their answers next week. Follow up discussion: What question did you choose, and why? How did the conversation go? Did the conversation lead to more questions or spiritual topics? What might be the next question you ask?

MISSION TOOL #2: GET TO KNOW YOUR CITY

*Read and Discuss*¹. Do you know what the population in Reno is? It was 241,445 in 2015, up by over 1/3 since 2000. Do you know that it is 50.9% male, with the average age being 35 years old? Median income per household is \$46,489. Reno is 74% white, 27% Hispanic, 6.5% Asian, 4% mixed-race, and 3% black. 86% of the population has a high school degree or higher, but only 30% have a bachelor's degree or better. Eight percent are unemployed, and 19% are in poverty. Out of 21,577 business firms, 6,898 were owned by women in 2012, and 2,222 were owned by veterans. Only 16.5% of Reno residents were born outside of the USA.²

Reno was founded in 1868 through the 1859 building of a bridge over the Truckee river to connect Virginia City to the California Trail. A community sprang up around the bridge and river. In the 1930s, Nevada became the only state to offer legal open gambling and liberal divorce laws. In fact, many of the motels that are now in disrepair were established to allow people to gain residency (six weeks) in Reno to enable their "quickie divorce." Gambling overtook the divorce business as other states became more liberal. Since 2000, relaxed casino laws in California have reduced the gambling business in Reno³. With the proximity of Reno and its airport to Lake Tahoe, Mammoth and other Sierra Nevada jewels, as well as Nevada's business-friendly laws, Reno is seeing an economic upturn as the culture adapts. In addition, the top two employers in Reno are educational: Washoe County School District and University of Nevada, Reno employed 12,500 in 2013. While Burning Man is technically not in Reno, most of the 70,000 attendees fly in through Reno, or stay before or after the event. Burning Man is the largest, defining event associated with this city.

Based off this brief look into Reno, discuss the following:

- Is anything in the information about Reno surprising to you? Fascinating? Do you know any statistics or interesting facts about Reno not shared here?
- Does any of this information shed light on strengths and weaknesses of this city? What about strengths and weaknesses of individuals in this city?
- What is the most average person you'd meet in Reno, based off the statistics? (White 34-year-old male, with divorced parents, working in the school district and making about \$45K/year, perhaps burning man attendee) What might be the needs, sins, talents, dreams or hopes of this 'average' person? Do those seem to make sense in light of the vices and beauty we see in the city around us?
- How could you personally, and the group collectively, more wisely love and bless Reno based off this information? What are other ways you could learn about and get to know your own city better?
- What small actions can we take now to know and love our city better?

Summing up: To reach others with the gospel, we have to specifically know them – their loves, fears, dreams, hopes, sins. Jesus reaches each of us a little differently and shows us his love by addressing our unique selves. To be good missionaries, we need to know the people we are trying to reach – and that includes the culture each one is immersed in. We don't change

¹ If you are not in Reno, take some time to look up demographical and social information about your city, and update the information accordingly. You don't need to know everything – an hour of research should be plenty.

² Taken from: <http://www.city-data.com/city/Reno-Nevada.html> and <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/3260600>

³ Taken from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reno,_Nevada

culture, we know and love people – and God changes them, and in turn changed people change culture.

MISSION TOOL #3: PRAYER FOR THE LOST

Instructions: get together on a night outside of community group, or work with your community group leader to designate a regular night to be for praying for friends, family, and a city that do not know Jesus. If you are able to pull it off, a prayer walk would be great; have everyone meet together in a place that you want to pray over (your neighborhood, perhaps?) or a place with a good view of your city (Reno, Sparks, Elko, etc.). Divide your group into 'pods' of 2-3 folks to pray for the city – for its welfare and the salvation of its people. If this is too difficult to coordinate or the weather is preventative, you could meet together at your regular location and pray.

Prayer items for all:

- Extended prayer for 1-2 non-Christian friends or co-workers
 - prayer for the specifics of their lives (families, jobs, mental health, etc.)
 - prayer for their salvation – awakening of their souls, thirst for God, seeking life beyond their current circumstances, dissatisfaction with life as-is, protection against self-deceit and lies from the Enemy, etc.
 - prayer for your personal role in their lives – words and actions of love, how to be Jesus' hands, feet and voice to them.
- Extended prayer for the city
 - the cultural darkness to **reject** (sex trade, drug culture, despair, violence, anger, poverty)
 - the cultural unique gifts to be **redeemed** (artistry, businesses, communities, events, environmental development, etc.)
 - the cultural light to **receive** and support (those working to make the city a better place, protect and provide for children, etc.)
 - the city's leadership – government officials, activist groups, etc. – that they would be led by God for the good of the city
 - the poor and powerless in the city – to find hope in God, and to be protected, cared for, and respected by those around them.
 - the people of the city to be saved, and to see the city become a place of light that sends out more missionaries into the darkness
- Extended prayer for ourselves
 - Eyes to see the needs and opportunities in front of us to share the gospel in our words and deeds
 - Wisdom to know how and when to speak the gospel to those who don't know Jesus
 - Diligence, patience, boldness and perseverance in prayer and relationship-building with non-Christians.

After the prayer time has concluded it might be a good idea to bring folks back together to discuss any ideas or thoughts people got in the midst of their prayer time regarding the topics prayed over – whether a personal revelation or ideas on how the group could minister, etc.

MISSION TOOL #4: CULTURAL ACTIVITY

When Jesus left heaven to come to earth as a baby, the Bible talks about how he “grew in wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:52). Interestingly, Jesus did not just have it all figured out because he was God... he had to learn and grow as well. Part of this was learning how to be a Jewish man of the time, ultimately so he could sympathize and understand us better by identifying with us.

In church and with our Christian circles, it can be easy to think what we do and say is easy to connect with or understand. But outsiders may (and do) experience church and small groups very differently than we do.

A great way to both learn about others and understand better what it feels like to be an outsider, is to take part in a cultural event or activity that is completely foreign to you! It can be both fun and uncomfortable and really helps you become a better observer. Get your whole group in on the adventure!

Instructions: Well in advance, plan with your group to participate in some “cross-cultural” activities. Rather than having the whole group go do something together, break the group up into twos or threes, and have those groups select something people-oriented to do that no one in the group has done before, or participated in. Here are some ideas:

- ride a city bus
- go to a concert for a genre of music you don't listen to
- attend a club meeting for a club all about something you know nothing about
- attend a University event intended for a different demographic and/or an interest that is not yours
- spend an hour or so in a park or busy area where people congregate where you normally would not 'hang out.' (skate park, bus stop, etc.)
- attend a Latin American church service
- Go to a gym/work out/dance class that is unfamiliar

It should go without saying, but whatever the group chooses to do, please make sure that it is generally safe and not morally questionable (e.g., no studying the strip club or an ecstasy rave!).

Once you have selected your cultural activity to try, plan a time for your group to participate. Try not to huddle together too much – e.g., if you take a dance class, don't all stand next to each other in the room, or if you ride the bus, don't all sit together. You want to experience the new thing without a “safety net” of your friends being right next to you.

While you are experiencing your cultural event, pay attention to:

- Your feelings of comfort/discomfort – what triggers them?
- Words, phrases, lingo that others use
- What kinds of clothes people wear
- How people interact with each other (when and how)
- What people do that they don't explain
- What signs or directions are available to explain things to you
- What others expect you to know or do

Try to learn as much as you can about the people and the cultural event as you can through observing, and not through explicitly asking.

Afterwards, review the bulleted items above with your group to compare notes. Then, as a full community group, at your next regular meeting, spend time discussing what it was like to be an outsider. Then discuss – how does this knowledge change the way I think about my own group and church on Sunday? How can I make my group more inviting and understanding to non-Christians? How can I help non-Christians visiting our church on a Sunday to feel welcomed and comfortable?

MISSION TOOL #5: RENO CULTURE & ACTS 17

As a group, read Acts 17:16-33. Paul, one of Christianity's first missionaries, here discovers a cultural piece of the Athenians and uses it to present the gospel. Have the group discuss the following:

1. How does verse 16 describe Paul's personal/internal response to Athens' cultural observations? How could this be comforting to us today?
2. What does verse 21 say about Athenian culture? How does this cultural knowledge inform Paul's address to the Athenians in the following verses?
3. How does Paul's statement in verses 22-23 contrast with his internal response in verse 16? What happens in between these verses for Paul?
4. What is Paul doing in verses 22-23, and verses 28-29 especially?
5. What was the result of Paul's speech to the listeners?
6. What might be practical truths we can gather from this passage in thinking about our own desire to tell non-Christians in our city about Jesus?
7. What are some potential beloved cultural icons that could be "launch pads" for us to naturally discuss the gospel with locals? How might we, say, use Lake Tahoe, or gambling (or the concept of luck), or drinking as doors to talk about the gospel?

COMMUNITY TOOL #6: SUNDAY INVITE CHALLENGE

Challenge your group! A lot of non-Christians visit our church on Sundays, as well as those very uncertain in their faith. The majority are not in Community and have no place to ask questions, grow, or be encouraged spiritually. Pastor Jason calls this “low hanging fruit” when it comes to mission. Have your group take advantage of this.

For one full month (four Sundays), get everyone to agree to play along and report back results to each other.

1. Sit someplace different. Don't everybody sit together, or in your “typical” spot. Pick a new place for the month, divide and conquer.
2. Prepare slips of paper in advance with your group's info – what night you meet, address, your name, number. Bring these with you to church.
3. Before the service, during the greeting time, or immediately following, introduce yourself to at least one person you don't know. Ask them how long they've been attending Living Stones, and whether they are in a Community Group. If they are not, invite them to attend yours and give them the information right then.
4. Be yourself, but be friendly. If you are on the quiet side and find conversation hard, think of a few easy questions to ask in advance (Are you from around here? Where do you work? What are you studying? What's your favorite thing to do here in the winter?). Make it your goal to be friendly with just one person a Sunday, and then give yourself a break.

Remember, Living Stones on Sunday is a very large experience, and for those who are new, not only are the activities and words foreign, it is easy to assume that “everybody else knows what they're doing and are friends already.” Even new people looking at new people can assume that the other new person knows what they are doing. And those of us who have attended for a long time, we can assume others are handling new people and that being 1 in 1,000 means our welcome doesn't do much. A way you can serve and love people is to take ownership for the Sunday experience and behave like a host.

After the four Sunday trial, discuss together as a group:

- What worked well with this challenge? What needs or needed to be adapted?
- What do we want to continue to do?
- Is there feedback we can give to the leadership that will help them make the Sunday experience and Community Group connection better for newcomers? (If there is, please take initiative to send this to your leader and Pastor Jason)