

# reNEW

Bible principles and practical steps  
towards church revitalisation

## notes for session 3 Mystery Shopper

This workbook may contain preparatory notes,  
leaders notes, participant notes or discussion starters.  
It can be downloaded as a pdf and printed as required.



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## Session 3 Video

The session 3 video - Mystery Shopper  
Running Time 15 minutes 51 seconds

Access via the Partnership website:  
<https://partnershipuk.org/renew-session-3/>  
or, for smart TV,  
<https://vimeo.com/479053560/3a04cbe41d>

reNew is a video-based learning resource to help us think through Bible principles and practical steps towards revitalisation. Simon Ladd has had over 35 years of experience in church leadership, serving in a variety of local churches in SE England. Drawing on both his own experience and that of those with whom he has served, reNew is a tool that can help you, as a leader, think through the regrowth possibilities in your local church.

## LEADER'S NOTES

### Session 3 – Mystery Shopper

*These notes were written pre-Covid. You will need to make adjustments according to your situation.*

#### General Notes

- Think about where it is best to hold this meeting. Somewhere informal, such as somebody's home might be a nice venue. Can you move around to different houses during the course? This involves more people and builds community as people visit the homes of others. It allows people to 'practice hospitality'. (Romans 12:13).
- Encourage people to keep it simple – tea, coffee, cold drink and a few biscuits. Do not allow a hospitality 'arms race' to develop – where people try and 'out do' each other – and do not let the provision of food become an expensive time-consuming burden.
- Start on time – even if some people are not there yet. If you don't - start times just drift later and later. Some people will inevitably be a bit late – but it is amazing how often it is the same people!
- You will need to be able to show the video. Aim for a big television that everybody can see – a laptop is not really adequate. If you have a smart TV – you will be able to get the video from YouTube/ Vimeo. Make sure everybody can hear.
- These sessions are designed to last 60 to 75 minutes including the video at the beginning and prayer at the end. Don't let them go on longer. Some people need to know that things will end promptly or they will stop coming.
- Do not be tempted to tell everybody to watch the video for themselves – and then we will meet up and discuss it. It is not the same.
- Don't skip the first 'ice-breaker' question. Some people are terrified of speaking out in a group. The ice-breaker is designed to give people confidence by getting them more used to speaking up when there is no danger of them being wrong.

- The best group size for discussion is 6 – 12. If there are more than 12 – split into multiple groups for discussion.
- Try new people as chair. Give them the leaders notes in advance and let them have a go at leading one question. You might be surprised.
- A common reason why churches aren't growing is because present leaders are hogging their roles and responsibilities. Only insecure leaders hog their roles. Good leaders are always looking to involve and develop others.
- Your task as chair is to keep the noisy people quiet and get the quiet people to speak up. A useful technique is to say "For this question we will start with somebody who hasn't spoken so far".
- Welcome all contributions even if they seem off the point. If you don't think they are right – do not contradict the person (unless it is heresy!) and do not make the person feel small. Another useful technique "Mmmm I haven't about it that way before – what do other people think of that?"

## Session Ice Breaker

This is an ‘ice-breaker’ type question to start things off before you begin the video.

These introductory questions serve 2 useful functions

- some people are notably reluctant to speak up when things get ‘theological’ – but these ‘ice-breaker’ questions are deliberately of a different character. They ask people to share their thoughts, stories or opinions on ‘non-Bible’ issues. This helps people to gain confidence in speaking out.
- usually somebody in the group will arrive a bit late; the ‘ice-breaker’ allows things to start on time – but without the late-comers missing out on the most important aspects of the topic.

1. *When you see somebody doing a street survey – do you avoid them, or are you keen to be asked – and why? Who has never participated in a street survey? If you have been canvassed – what were you asked about, how long did it take and how did you feel about it all?*

Of course, there isn’t an answer to this – apart from your own experiences and opinions.

Me? I avoid them. I’m usually busy with something and I say to myself “I don’t have time for this”. Also, I am quite suspicious of street surveys. In the past, what seemed like an innocent survey has turned out to be quite a hard sell of something I didn’t want and I felt abused. Also (I must be a horrible person) I think ‘What do I get out of this?’ You are being paid to ask the questions, the company is getting the information it wants – but what do I get out of it?

## Video Script

In this video questions are posed and then possible responses are considered by Simon. There are clearly marked points in the video where you should stop to discuss the questions. The script and timeline are given here to assist you.

### 00.00 Introduction

I occasionally work as a mystery shopper. The assignments vary but the idea is the same. I'm asked to visit a shop or a restaurant, make a purchase and write a report. Whatever you pay out, you get back on expenses and they pay you for your time – so you can get a meal for free and get paid to eat it!

In the report, you usually have first to comment on how the premises looks from outside. Is it clean? Is it in good decorative order? is it well signposted? – does it look inviting? And once inside, there is almost always a section on 'first contact'. How long did it take for one of the staff to acknowledge you and speak to you and what exactly did they say?

In truth, it's not very well paid, the report you have to write is quite detailed and takes a long time – but it is quite fun doing undercover work. I am 007.

But it wasn't long before I started thinking – what if you did a mystery shopper exercise on church?

You might be thinking, I not really keen on this business type approach to church – and I largely agree with you. But when Paul is speaking about the qualifications of church leaders, (1 Timothy 3:7) one of the requirements that he mentions is that they should have a good reputation with outsiders.

Few churches seem to take this requirement seriously – but I know of one church that contacted their place of work. "We are considering appointing Colin to our church leadership team – and we are writing to you as his boss, to

seek your opinion.”

They got a reply, “Colin is honest, reliable, well liked and well-respected here for his balance and wise council – and we think that he will make an excellent church leader.” What a great reply!

If it is a requirement that a church-leader should have a good reputation with outsiders – surely, it is something that a church should aim for too – to have a good reputation with outsiders.

## 02.50

Five more things to say as part of the introduction:

- You only get one chance to make a first impression – so it is important to get it right
- It is impossible to see with fresh eyes – something that you are familiar with. So the best thing to do is use fresh eyes. If you want to know how other people see you – it is best to ask them.
- Going to the community and asking them what they think of the church is a very valuable way of making connections with your area. If this is done strategically, the value is not just in the information you will get – it is also in the relationships that you will create and the bridges that you are building.
- Action. Of course, you can’t decide what action to take, until further on in the process – but it is important to make a commitment at the beginning, that this won’t be merely an information gathering academic exercise – it will lead to action.
- This whole exercise will be shaped by your situation. A church in a small village will need to go about it very differently from a church in a big city. And lots of this will need to be fine-tuned by yourselves.

## 04.29

So we are going to tackle questions 2 to 6. Please be ready to stop the video after each question.

Imagine that you are outside a parade of shops a few hundred

yards from your church. Your intention is to do a street survey asking members of the public questions about your church

**04.53**     2. *Who should do this survey on behalf of the church?*

3. *What should they wear?*

**05.01**     **STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS**

**05.07**     Discussion of responses

2. *Who should do this survey on behalf of the church?*

Doing this kind of cold street survey is not everybody's cup of tea! But some people will love doing it. But some of the people first to volunteer may not be the most suitable. The people doing the survey are representing the church and the impression that they make reflects back on the church. It is best to choose friendly, open, non-threatening type of people who don't give off a vibe of being weird!

3. *What should they wear?*

I would say that smart casual is the best dress for this. You might choose to give them a clipboard and a high-vis tabard – that is the universally recognised uniform of people doing street surveys. And it allows the public to identify them early – and steer away if they don't want to get involved.

**06.15**     4. *With what exact words should the people doing your survey introduce themselves? Try and come up with an introduction that lasts no more than 15 seconds.*

**06:34**     **STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS**

**06:35**     Discussion of responses

Hi. We are not selling anything. We are from St Stevens Church just down the road. We are conducting a survey. It really is just 3 minutes and we are giving away FREE Costa



coffee. Are you local and would you be willing to help?

**07:01** 5. *What questions should you ask? Try to come up with a list of useful questions that you could ask and get responses to in 3 minutes*

**07:17** **STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS**

**07:20** Discussion of responses

So. Preamble. We are not recording names or addresses and this survey is fully compliant with General Data Protection Requirements

How far to the nearest mile do you live from here?

It is very rude to ask anybody this – but what age bracket are you in - 20's, 30's, 40's?

Have you ever heard of St Stevens church?

Have you ever attended any event at St Stevens church? If yes – what was it?

Do you know of anything that St Steven's Church does – that you think benefits the community?

I think lots of people wouldn't know. Apart from church services. We do parents and toddlers. Senior citizens lunch club. Youth Club. We run a food Food Bank. There is a Debt counselling service. We host the annual exhibition for the Bury Art Society. And we are a Polling Station – so there are quite a few things.

Anyway thank you for your time: here is a voucher for a free coffee at Costa, and here is a leaflet about St Stephens. Thank you very much for helping.

Do you see that you have got information – but you have also imparted information. Hopefully they now have a better impression of St Stephens church than they did before.

09:15 6. *Apart from a street survey – what other ways can you think of to find out how your church is viewed by the local community?*

9.30 **STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS**

Discussion of responses

9.32

The ideas that you have come up with here are likely to be well suited to your situation. Some things will fit in a small village that don't really work in the big city.

Here are a few ideas:

You could just challenge members of your congregation to ask their friends, neighbours, workmates – to very informally start conversations along these lines. "You know that I go to St Stevens, we are trying to find out how we are viewed by our community. What would you say?"

And then feed any comments back to the leadership. I'm thinking of Sheila, who asked a friend who doesn't go to church, "When you drive past our church what impression do you get?" "Oooh" said her friend, "It's spooky. All that dark paintwork, and the lintels painted black makes it look like the whole building is frowning at you"

Wow. What feedback. 150 people go to that church each week and none of them had thought of it like that. Sheila, who is quite a force of nature, had organised, within a few months to get the façade repainted – and when I next saw it, it was true, the building looked much more light, bright, open and welcoming.

Or

What about your online presence? Could you ask a friend or neighbour if they would do a search online for your church and see what they find. Don't direct them to your website. Just let them start with Google from scratch. They might find several abandoned websites, or aborted web pages, or pages so out-of-date that you are still advertising

your Christmas Carol service in July!

One church that I talked with about this had actually been the subject of a mystery worshipper investigation! They showed the report on the website *ship of fools* (<http://www.ship-of-fools.com/mystery/>)

It was interesting reading – and they have done hundreds of other reports too. If you are really brave you could organise for a mystery worshipper to come to your church. I'm sure that you will also have come up with other ideas that suit your local situation.

## 12.00

So, we are coming to the end – this is where we move towards action and outcomes.

In this video we have established the principle that a church should aim to have a good reputation with outsiders. We have talked about a variety of ways that a church could go about finding how it is viewed by its local community and that there is the potential for making connections, starting conversations and getting information out there, while this is being done.

So it's time to decide a plan of action:

- What methods are we going to use to find out what our area thinks of our church.
- Who is going to do it?
- What is the time-scale?
- How are we going to report what we find to the whole church?

## 12.47

### **STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS A PLAN OF ACTION**

## 12.50

And then – what are we going to do with what we discover. What do we want to be known for? What kind of reputation would we like?

One of the tricks in advertising is to swap the question around – it sometimes helps to focus our thinking.

**13.16** 7. *What kind of reputation do you NOT want your church to have?*

**13.27** **STOP VIDEO TO DISCUSS**

**13.30** Discussion of responses

Here are a list of things that I don't want the church to be known for being:

- boring
- hypocritical
- hypercritical
- unfriendly
- judgemental
- clicky
- irrelevant
- bigoted
- narrow minded
- just for old people
- for weak people who need a crutch
- for the dim-witted and gullible
- homophobic
- supressing the rights of women
- people with a flat-earth mentality

**13.55** In surveys, the most popular denomination in the UK is always the Salvation Army – because they are perceived as doing something practical, not just talking.

*Jesus says, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)*

We shouldn't just be full of good deeds secretly, we should shine them out – to glory of God

*Paul says, (Romans 14:17) For the kingdom of God is justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

**14.39** Is your church championing justice in your locality - standing up for the oppressed, pioneering peace and exhibiting joy?

And the challenge comes, too, in Titus Chapter 2 and verse 10:

*Live lives that adorn the Gospel.*

Our churches should adorn the gospel too.

Does our church attract or repel?

**15.06** Does our church, in its totality, draw people in or push them away?

Are we putting up barriers or building bridges?

Are we reinforcing negative stereotypes that the church is irrelevant, out of date and boring - or surprising people, intriguing them, drawing them in, winning them, so that they look again at the teaching of the Bible, consider afresh the claims of Christ and have an opportunity to meet the risen Saviour for themselves.

**15:51**

## **SAMPLE SURVEY NOTES**

Here is a framework you could begin with. It will need to be tweaked to fit your locality. It is designed to be used two ways:

### **OFFICIALLY**

Whoever is doing this is representing the church. They should be a friendly, open person who does not give off a weirdo vibe! They should be dressed (smart) casually, and I recommend that they wear a fluorescent tabbard and carry a clipboard, which is the widely recognised attire of people doing surveys. This also gives the general public a fighting chance of avoiding them if they choose to. A good site to do this would be outside a local parade of shops within a mile of your church.

### **WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY, NEIGHBOURS, WORKMATES**

Every church has a large 'fringe' of family, friends and neighbours who don't come along to the church. Challenge the people who come along to your church to fill in at least 2 of these questionnaires with their friends, family members, workmates or neighbours.

### **GOLDEN RULE**

Nobody using this officially, or unofficially, must comment, contradict or argue with anybody's answers. We are here to listen. Asking somebody a question and listening carefully to the answer shows that we value their point of view and respect them as a person.

### **PREAMBLE FOR USE WITH STRANGERS ON THE STREET**

*Hi. We aren't selling anything. We just a just gathering local opinion.*

*Do you live within a mile of here? (you might need to tweak this)*

*If they live too far away—*

*Ah Ok, this is a local survey so I won't bother you further. Thank you for your time. Have a good day.*

*If they live within your target distance continue. . . .*

*This genuinely only takes 3 minutes and we are giving away a voucher for a FREE Costa coffee (tweak this to what works for you). Would you be willing to help us?*

## **Opening Up**

*We are not recording any names or addresses, and the information given cannot be linked back to any individual. This survey is fully compliant with all relevant General Data Protection Legislation*

*We are from XXX church and we are trying to find out if local people know anything about us and what they think.*

### **Question 1 - Gender**

*Are you female / male / other (please specify)/ prefer not to say*

*(You might choose to leave this question out but get your survey takers to mark the sheets Male or female after the person has gone)*

### **Question 2—Age**

*I know this is terribly rude, but what is your age to the nearest 10 years, are you in your 20's, 30's, 40's . . . .*

**Add your own questions** - but keep it short:

*Have you heard of XXX church?*

*Do you know where XXX church is?*

*Have you ever been inside?*

*If YES*

*Did you attend a Sunday service / wedding / funeral / toddlers / craft club?*

*If NO*

*How many people do you think are involved in some activity at the church in a normal week.*

### **Question - Church Community Engagement**

*Are you aware of anything that XXX church does that is good for the community?*

### **Question - religious belief**

*Which of these statements best describes your religious belief*

- 1. I'm a Christian*
- 2. I follow another religion*
- 3. I'm not sure if I believe in God—but I'm open minded*
- 4. I don't believe in any God or supreme being*

*If you could ask God one question what would it be?*

## Concluding

*Thank you very much for helping us today. Here's the promised voucher for a FREE costa coffee. and a leaflet about XXX church. (hand both over together)*

*We are asking these questions to as many local people as we can. We will gather the results together, and, if you are interested, you'll be able to see the results on our website – the address is there on the back of the leaflet.*

*Thank you again.*

## THE LEAFLET

Get somebody talented to produce a nice leaflet. It should be well bright, big font, colourful, lots of photographs (no word art), lots of space - and not crammed onto the page.

CPO (cpodigital.org) have great little series of inexpensive booklets to give guidance on all sorts of communications, and they have designers too. Talk to them if you're not sure where to start.

DO NOT have a 'WHAT WE BELIEVE' section.

DO NOT put your mission statement on it. It is not that kind of leaflet.

### **Acceptable content:**

The history of your church in one interesting paragraph

***What your church DOES:*** Sunday services, toddlers, art club, youth club, coffee and craft, food bank, polling station, vaccination centre

***Facilities:*** Parking, disabled access, electric vehicle charging point. A hall that can be hired for parties.

***Contact details:*** Address including postcode. Email. Phone. Website. Map of where your church is.