

A GUIDE TO PRAYER WALKING

The Fresh Expression Journey begins with *listening*. One way to begin intentionally listening is to prayer walk the neighborhood or area your church wants to get to know.



1. CHOOSE A LOCATION

Where do you need to go to pay attention and learn more?

Where are some areas you could go where you could intersect with people outside of your church walls?

Where is God putting on your heart to consider engaging in mission?

Identify a place or multiple places where you want to focus some time and energy. It may be places you go regularly, but now commit to go with a heightened awareness and curiosity as you try to see the people there with new eyes. It may be a place with which you are unfamiliar, and want to get to know.



2. RECRUIT A TEAM

Who needs to go with you to have this experience?

One of the single best ways you can build interest in serving people beyond your church is to get a group of people from your church to see the needs and hear the stories of people in the community.

Be clear about what you are inviting people into.

This is not: knocking on doors, handing out tracts, inviting people to your church, debating people about Christianity

This is: paying attention to the people and the rhythms and the deeper story of your community, fostering natural conversations and listening to what people have to share, discovering what God is already up to in the neighborhood and how to potentially join in

It's also...fun. You'll be surprised what you can learn about your community if you're willing to see it with new eyes and listen deeply.



3. PRAY & READ SCRIPTURE WITH YOUR TEAM

Help your team find its grounding in the life of God.

Try digging into Matthew 9:35-38 together.

What words or phrases jump out?

What is God saying to each of you through this passage?

How might this passage relate to what we are about to do?

Take time to pray together. Consider praying into people's apprehensions and fears if prayer walking feels intimidating to some on your team.



4. WALK AROUND

Walk or drive around the identified area. And pay attention to what you see.

Begin to notice things like:

Who is here and who isn't here?

What do I notice about the rhythms or realities of this place?

What fliers or signs do I see?

Are people talking with one another? Are they alone?

How are they dressed?

What kinds of transportation?

What kinds of housing?

What is your visceral response?



5. PRAY

Pray as you go.

Pray for the people you see, the businesses you pass, the servers who take care of you, the situations you pass by.

Prayer does not have to be a bow-your-head, talk-in-big-churchy-words kind of experience. Look around and pray as you are looking around. Pray aloud if you wish, or pray silently if you prefer. Pray as you notice trash on the ground, children playing, workers hurrying, bus riders waiting, etc.

You can even offer to pray for someone if the opportunity presents itself. This takes some discernment and thoughtful reading of social cues, but if the Spirit prompts you to offer to pray for someone...take a chance and do it.



6. FOSTER CONVERSATION

Try to strike up a conversation with at least one person as you go. Look for opportunities that you can naturally start a conversation

Possible conversation starters:

What do you love about living/working here?

What is challenging about living/working here?

What do you think some of the needs of our community are?

What would you love to see in this community?

What do people do for fun here?

What's it like to be a (mom, a farmer, a waiter, a bartender, a senior citizen...) in this community today?

Remember: though your task is to listen, you are still a witness. How you behave speaks volumes. Read people's cues on whether they might be open to conversation or not. Treat people with kindness and respect. Be attentive to social cues...if people have interest in further conversation or whether you need to move on or if people have a job that they need to tend to.

This is not a time for you to tell people about how great your church is. Rather, this is a time for you to invite people to share their perspectives and stories so...so ask some questions and listen.



7. DEBRIEF

Debrief the experience with others.

What did you notice?

What did you hear?

What surprised you?

What troubled you?

Were there people or situations that resonated with you or broke your heart?

Where did you notice God already at work in this community?

Is there anything you sense God stirring in you from our time prayer walking?

If you have access to Mission Insights or other demographic studies, consider comparing what you experienced on the ground with the demographic information about the area.

What insights arise as you look at the data and reflect on your conversations?



8. BRAINSTORM

Take the opportunity to catalyze the evangelism energy that might be rising up.

Invite some ideas from the group...no idea is too wild. Get creative. Don't critique the ideas yet, just invite ideas and make a list of all the possibilities that emerge from the team.

Based on this experience, what could we do to love and serve based on what we discovered?

How might we continue to listen?

What kind of fresh expression can we imagine would resonate in the community we just experienced?

What might we do if we knew we couldn't fail?

After a time of brainstorming, discern if there are any ideas that are worth beginning to pursue.

(Note: it may take multiple prayer walks before you feel like you have enough of the deeper story of the community to begin to form concrete action plans.)

Are there any next steps we sense God is asking us to take?

Conversations we need to have, further listening we need to do, next steps we might take?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Do I pray out loud or silently?

Yes. Either or both is fine. Some people feel comfortable speaking prayers aloud as they walk along, and others prefer to pray silently as they walk.

How do I do this if I live in a rural setting?

You do not have to literally walk the sidewalks of a neighborhood...especially if there are no sidewalks and your setting is a patchwork of farms or scattered homes. Get in the practice of just noticing people where there are some natural gathering places (local markets, livestock shows, cafes). Drive around the backroads and ask God for eyes to see the needs of the community and opportunities for connecting with people. See who God puts in your path...and pray for them.

Should I do this in teams or alone?

You can do either. If you prayer walk in teams, make sure that the teams are small if you hope to foster some conversations in the community along the way. A group of 10 people coming at you is a bit intimidating, so groups of 2 or 3 are often more effective in engaging in conversations with people along the journey.

How can I best follow up on what I am discovering about my community through prayer walking?

Notice some threads that God seems to be weaving together: perhaps a people group that keeps crossing your path as you walk, or networks of people who you really resonate with, or networks of people for whom your heart is breaking, or a sense of God drawing you towards a particular neighborhood or people group. These are signs that God might be drawing you towards deeper engagement with this community.