

Sierra Leadership Network Curriculum: Month 7, Year 2

Participation in the Sierra Leadership Network (SLN) is a process of adult learning. It is the responsibility of the participant to do their assignments and seek out the necessary accountability. It is the responsibility of the participant to schedule time with their mentor, not the other way around. Here is a checklist of this month's exercises and space for comments. All useful generated materials should be placed in your Sierra Leadership Network binder. The mentor will look over the exercises and be given opportunity to add their own comments. Be sure you take your binder to the quarterly meetings at Granite Springs Church to also be available to the SLN directors.

Month 7, Year 2

Date Completed

____/____/____ Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age
[Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments:

____/____/____ Relationships with Seekers:
Mentor Comments [Estimated time: _____]

____/____/____ Confidence
Mentor Comments : [Estimated time: _____]

Participant Signature

Mentor Signature

I. Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age

1. Our culture has a tremendous fascination and respect for the religious traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Part of this has turned into a new religious expression often called “New Age Spirituality”. The influence of this religious movement in America today is pervasive, especially in the West, in urban areas and in university contexts. Do some research on Hinduism, Buddhism and the New Age movement and try to answer the questions below. One book that I have found very helpful in understanding World Religions is The World Religions written by Huston Smith. It is a widely used text in universities. Smith does a very fair and impartial job of explaining what these religions espouse and putting it into a language that those of us coming from a Judeo-Christian background can assimilate. Another book of his Why Religion Matters talks in depth about the challenge of secularism and gives him a chance to sketch out his own religious world view (although not a traditional Christian one). I recommend both books on this subject. The Internet is also filled with websites that try to articulate what different religions profess. For the purposes of this exercise I would avoid Christian sites that are apologetic in nature. Those are helpful sites too as are many fine books (I like IVP’s Handbook of Christian Apologetics by Peter Kreeft) but to be fair it is preferable and most helpful to let the voices of those who espouse their own positions speak first.
2. Questions
 - a. What is the understanding of the nature of the “divine” by Hinduism and Buddhism? What is “god” to them?
 - b. What is the goal of individual or corporate human experience for Hinduism and Buddhism? What should we be living for and towards? What is the greatest good that should be strived after?
 - c. How is this goal attained? Practices? Rituals? Philosophies?
 - d. What are the major religious texts or teachers of Hinduism and Buddhism? What are the major religious branches or divisions?
 - e. What are the four noble truths of Buddhism and the Eight-fold path?
 - f. Hindus often profess that they can adhere to any religion and that all religions lead to the same place. Why do they say that?
 - g. Buddhists (especially American Buddhists) will often state their theirs isn’t truly a religion, that you can be a good Christian and a Buddhist. Why do they say this? How would you respond to this?
 - h. Is the New Age movement really a religion? Why or why not? How is it like a religion, how is it not?
 - i. What does the New Age movement seem to borrow from Hinduism or Buddhism? How is the New Age movement a very American religion?
 - j. Who are some New Age speakers and writers that seem to have America’s ear.
 - k. Extra credit: How would you best describe Oprah’s religious expression (at least as represented by her program and publications)?

II Relationships With Seekers

1. Christian Evangelism contains a natural tension. On one hand we are given the commission of Christ to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). Although we resist judgment, love impels us to concern ourselves with the eternal destination of our neighbors, friends and families. We enjoy Christ and all his benefits, and like any generous person we would like to share a good thing with those we love. All of this is fine but in the context of relationships the agenda of Christian evangelism can become an obstacle. Few of us really enjoy a relationship in which the other person has a political or religious agenda. We want to be loved and embraced for who we are. This gets even more sticky when it comes to institutional religious practice. How often don't we want to do evangelism in order to enfold others into membership, service and financial support for our churches. Is "friendship evangelism" an oxymoron?
2. Here are a few thoughts to ponder before the assignment:
 - a. Relationships have to be more about love and respect than a religious goal. I believe Christianity demands that. It was love, of course that cause God to initiate his plan of redemption (John 3:16).
 - b. It is God who elects, calls, gathers, enfolds. It is his good pleasure to use us and it is our duty to be diligent in this effort, but any assumption that this is OUR work PRIMARILY distorts our relationship with God and others. Let God work as he sees fit. Let's just work on our faithfulness.
 - c. Christian discipleship is more than simply a decision or a lifestyle choice. Everyone's vision of who Jesus is and what Christianity is has been shaped by their experience and history. Many make "decisions for Christ" without any idea of what that means or how to get there. Our primary goal should be discipleship; being disciples and making disciples.
 - d. Faithfulness in Christian discipleship is a lifelong process of struggle, change, joy and suffering. We all muddle through with fits and starts. External indicators of faithfulness like church attendance can be notoriously deceptive in terms of real spiritual growth. If this is true for those of us, it will also be true for others.
 - e. God is known for taking his time and working in ways we can't see or don't understand. The Willow Creek Evangelism program has a formula: High Potency + Close Proximity + Clear Communication = Maximum Impact. We should be faithful and diligent with maximizing our impact but leaving room for God to get the glory by doing things his way.
 - f. The reality of hell punctuates the fact that there is loss in the universe. Not all will be saved and as CS Lewis said, the door to hell is locked from the inside.
3. Discuss with your mentor or write a piece on your relationship with one particular unchurched friend. How does your Christianity impact the relationship? What significant conversations or moments have you had in your relationship? What have you learned about evangelism through this relationship?

III Confidence

1. The book of Joshua begins with the death of Moses. Moses, this monumental figure who met with God, mediated the Exodus and the desert journey, gave the law, saw the death of one generation and the birth of another has been taken by God. Now Joshua has been given the task of leading Israel into the promised land then occupied by the Canaanites living in walled cities. God gave Joshua a very specific command: Be Strong and Courageous! As a Christian leader, this too is a charge given to you. We read in the book of Acts how the Apostles preached with great boldness.

2. Lest we forget, even Moses didn't begin with much confidence. He wobbled and weasled in an attempt to escape God's calling his life. Part of growing up into Christian leadership involves confidence. Discuss this with your mentor or write a brief paper on this.
 - a. Do you display confidence? Do those who follow you gain confidence from yours?
 - b. Are you prone to overconfidence or timidity?
 - c. Can you be both confident and humble? Moses was described as the most humble man who had ever lived. Are these antithetical?
 - d. What really is confidence and where does it come from?
 - e. What good fruit does confidence yield in your life and ministry?