



# THE "FOCUS GROUP" STRATEGY

## IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO

You are part of a small group of five students (or volunteers) who are starting a ministry on your campus. It is now the beginning of the second month of the semester. Earlier in the year you had decided to use focus groups as part of your strategy, and now you are seeing the fruit:

In only four weeks your group has established an open, meaningful dialogue about spiritual things with 25-75 non-Christian students on your campus;

You have found nine more Christian students who want to get involved with your ministry on campus;

The Student Government has actually shown an interest in giving you money for future focus groups;

Each of the non-Christians now see the group facilitators as people who are easy to talk to, and who know what they believe but are great listeners. Most are willing to get together with you to discuss spiritual issues, because they realize they have questions and that you might actually have some answers. Some of them have even initiated getting together.

Sound good? In reality, it is not too far-fetched.

If you really do have a small group of five, as mentioned above, and if each of the five of you were to commit to leading one or two one-hour focus groups on your campus during the first four weeks of school, it wouldn't be unrealistic to see the above scenario become a reality.

## THE BIG PICTURE

Focus Groups have been around in the business world for years. They are typically comprised of anywhere from 5-15 people—people who are NOT involved with the company or organization— who attend specifically to provide feedback and opinions to help the company or organization learn and grow.

The general idea is that during the focus group, your role as the leader is to facilitate the discussion by asking carefully crafted questions and then allowing the participants to respond. Your goal is to build a safe environment in which the participants will feel the freedom to say whatever they are thinking. Your job is not to offer any answers, or even agree with any of their answers (in fact, you should promise to not say anything about what you believe), but rather to get them talking and—more importantly—thinking.

As a ministry strategy, the focus group gives students an opportunity to voice their opinions, feelings and thoughts about a wide range of topics in an environment that is nonthreatening and (usually) very interesting for the participants. These groups will give you clearer insight into the minds of non-Christian students.

From our perspective, as a Christian ministry seeking to influence the campus with the gospel, these groups often draw students who otherwise might not get anywhere near a Campus Crusade for Christ event. Focus groups get them thinking—and talking—about spiritual things, usually leaving them hungry for more discussion and interaction.

## II. THE BENEFITS OF THE FOCUS GROUP

Here are some of the many reasons you might consider using this strategy on your campus:

1. Focus Groups are incredibly easy to set up, advertise and lead. You don't need a ton of ministry experience to facilitate one of these groups. Plus, you are only looking for 5-15 participants, so you don't have to worry about drawing a huge crowd.
2. You can tailor the format to meet your needs, but whatever you choose, these groups do not demand a ton of time, either from the leader or from the participants, making it easy on you and more likely that nonbelievers will show up.
3. Focus Groups are fantastic 'PR' for your Campus Crusade group on campus. They will improve the perception of your group on campus in at least two ways. First, students will see you as willing to come onto 'their turf' as opposed to always inviting them to some meeting that they will perceive as religious. Second, asking students what THEY think—and committing to not saying anything ourselves—breaks people's stereotypes of Christians, and is very politically correct. Students love to give their input and opinions.
4. As a ministry tool, focus groups are likely to:
  - a. Surface Christians who are interested in getting more involved with an on-campus ministry;
  - b. Surface non-Christians who are interested in the Gospel, or at least open to talking about it;
  - c. Open a tremendously positive dialogue between the group leader and non-Christians in the group.
5. Non-Christian participants usually walk away feeling:
  - a. That the leader really listened to them;
  - b. That the leader didn't argue or 'fight back' when Christianity was attacked;
  - c. That the leader does know what he believes, but is as interested in the beliefs of others as he is in telling them about his;
  - d. That they don't know nearly as much about some of the issues raised as they thought they did before the group met;
  - e. That they want to know more what the leader believes, and whether or not he/she has answers to many of the questions that were raised.
  - f. That they would be open to getting together with the leader again, either for another such group, or maybe even for lunch or something.



### III. FORMATS THAT WORK

There are two different formats you might consider. The first is a one-time meeting—though students often ask to meet again after the initial focus group—that is 59 minutes long. This format seems to work well with students who are either extremely busy or who are fairly closed to Christians and/or Christianity. The second is a three-week series that has been used and developed by the staff at Texas A&M, which leads to more in-depth interaction, but also demands more time from the participants.

#### **The Basic Focus Group**

The Basic Focus Group consists of two parts. During the first 12 minutes, participants fill out as much of a brief written questionnaire as they can finish. The last 47 minutes are reserved for a guided discussion. The questionnaire is to get the students thinking about spiritual and philosophical issues. It also allows late comers to arrive without missing any of the discussion. During the discussion segment, the leader simply asks questions and guides the conversation (see the suggested list of questions, below).

#### **The Three-Week Focus Group Series**

The series format is designed to address the following issues, each in a 45- to 59- minute long discussion, over three consecutive weeks: What Am I Doing with My Life? With Whom Do I Spend My Time? and Why Am I Here? The discussion questions for these three groups are also below.

If you are seeking to generate contacts across campus, and to develop and grow a small campus ministry into a larger one, we'd recommend using the single, or Basic Focus Group format, repeatedly, in a variety of locations across campus. This will allow you to touch base, and initiate good conversations, with the largest number of students. If the ministry is more well developed, and you are seeking to reach a particular segment of the campus (like one specific dorm, for instance), you may want to consider the three-week series format.

When selecting between the two formats, each of which have been 'battle-tested,' you also will want to take into account the spiritual climate of your campus. If the students on your campus are fairly antagonistic towards Christianity, it may be more challenging to get them to make a three week commitment, and the Basic Focus Group format may result in better attendance.



## IV. HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

### A. How to Set Up the Meeting

There are four considerations you should take into account when planning a focus group: the location, the time of day (or night), the timing in the semester, and the involvement of an RA.

#### 1. Location

We would suggest holding a focus group in location where a majority of students would feel most comfortable. The location should be free of distractions and should allow for people to come and go without disrupting the group. You probably will want to hold it in a particular dorm, fraternity or sorority. You don't want a campus-wide focus group, because it could quite easily get too large.

#### 2. Time of Day

The time of day you choose will be a critical factor in determining who will (or will not) be able to participate. Because you will be inviting a number of non-Christians you already know (hopefully), choose a time when most of them would be available. If you are going to hold your focus group in a dorm, try it at 10pm at night, early in the week. A lot of folks are around the dorms at 10pm, and they may need or want a break from whatever it is that they have been doing. Be careful not to schedule your focus group during a popular TV show or big-time sporting event.

#### 3. Time of Semester

Be aware of midterm schedules when you plan your focus group. Enough said.

#### 4. Get Your RA Involved

Many RAs (Resident Advisors) are required to host a certain number of programs for their residents, and find it challenging to come up topics that are interesting to their residents. When you approach the RA about a focus group in a dorm, these tips will help:

- ⊕ Emphasize that this is designed to promote interaction and dialogue among his or her residents.
- ⊕ Emphasize that this is designed specifically FOR students who are NOT Christians, and who would disagree with what we believe, so that we could learn more about the perspective of others. This will prevent the RAs from thinking that since we are a Christian group, that this is for Christian students.



- ⊗ Repeatedly, in a variety of ways, let him or her know that you have promised not to talk about what we believe, at all, during the actual meeting. That way, even though the meeting is co-sponsored (hopefully) by both the RA and by Campus Crusade for Christ, there will be no worries about us ‘pushing’ (in his or her mind) our views on anyone.
- ⊗ Ask his advice on details, like when the best time to hold it would be, and where the most distraction free setting would be.
- ⊗ If he or she agrees to help, ask for help in publicizing the focus group.

**NOTE: Do Not Get Your Christian Friends Involved**

As strange as this sounds, it is very, very important that the room not be full of Christian students. For it to work, you really need to have just about everybody there be a non-Christian. If you want to bring one or two Christians with you, make it clear to them before the meeting that they are not to participate in the discussion, and then introduce them to the group as being with you and a part of Campus Crusade for Christ. Obviously, if a believer you didn’t know before the meeting shows up, and talks about these issues from a Christian perspective, let him talk. Just make sure you identify anyone involved with Campus Crusade before you actually start.

**B. How to get people to come to the meeting**

Posters, the help of the RA, individual invitations and prayer (this being the most important factor) will all contribute to ensuring that people actually show up. You also may want to try bribing them. Well, maybe enticing them is a better word, but more about that in a minute.

We have created a number of downloadable posters, in .pdf format, that you can print from any decent laser printer, and use as camera ready art. You will have to paste in the location, time, and date information, but other than that they are ready to go. The art is fairly simple so they will download and photocopy easily, but check them out. If you don’t like them, create your own. The point is to get the word out that the focus group will be taking place.

Personal invitations are much more effective, so we have also created some fliers and hand-outs you can photocopy and give to your friends. The posters will serve to remind them of the invitation you gave them, so both are important.

⊗ **And now a word from our sponsors...**

Several campuses have used free pizza to entice students to come to the focus group. The invitation goes something like this: “I am part of a Christian group on campus that is trying to get feedback from students from all sorts of backgrounds. We are hosting a focus group Tuesday night here in Jackson Hall. We are asking students to come and share their views and opinions on a variety of topics in a group discussion type format, based on questions I’ll be asking. Oh, and we’re going to be giving away free Domino’s pizza to anyone who shows up.”



At George Mason University, in Fairfax, VA, the Campus Crusade group has this running deal with Domino's that whenever they do a focus group, if they put a local Domino's coupon on the back of the fliers and handouts, the Domino's will provide the pizza for the meeting for free. It is likely that many other Domino's or pizza restaurants would make a similar deal if you just went and asked them. Use some of the same 'selling points' you will use with the RA and let Domino's know that you will give out a bunch of these coupons, and all it will cost them is a couple of pizzas...

### **C. How to prepare for the meeting.**

As the focus group leader, it is important to be familiar with the questions you will be asking, so that you will be able to concentrate on the students' responses, and be able to ask good follow-up questions. Other than that, there is not a lot of preparation, outside of prayer, that you can do.

#### **Suggested Timeline:**

##### **☞ Three weeks before:**

Set the meeting up, determining location, time, and whether or not you will have the help of an RA. Put posters up, and begin talking the focus group up with your non-Christian friends who you will invite. Begin praying.

##### **☞ Two weeks before:**

Keep praying, and get the personal handouts printed, and begin inviting people personally, by giving them something they can hold onto. Try to get them to tell you they will come.

##### **☞ One week before:**

Keep praying, and make sure that there are even more posters up now about the focus group, just as a reminder. Spend time with friends and students in the dorm, developing relationships with students, so that they will be more likely to come to the focus group when you ask them.

##### **☞ The day of:**

About an hour before the meeting, go to the place where it will be held, and make sure the set up of the room will allow for good conversation. The best atmosphere will have you sitting on the same level as the students, or slightly above them so they can see you. But the atmosphere you create should be super-casual and comfortable. Once room is ready, you and whoever is helping you should begin making the rounds in the dorm, reminding folks, and inviting them to come (even if you have invited them before).



## D. How to run the meeting.

The following tips refer to the Basic (one-time) Focus Group. Much of what is below also applies to the Three-Week Focus Group Series.

### 1. The Introduction

As the participants start to arrive for the meeting, hand them the written questionnaire, and welcome them. Make sure to start on time, even if there are only a couple of students there. The beauty of this concept is that it can still be a great success with only a couple of participants.

Your role at the beginning of the focus group is simply to explain what will be happening during the focus group, and to lay down the ground rules. Everything you say should be designed to help the students feel comfortable and safe so that as the meeting progresses, they will be more willing to be vulnerable and real.

Below is a sample introduction:

*“Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_, and I will be the facilitator tonight. First of all, I want to thank you for coming, I think by the end of tonight, you’ll be glad you did. As you know, we are here tonight to hear what YOU think. I am involved with a Christian organization on campus called Campus Crusade for Christ, as is Jane, over here, and we are not here to say anything at all.. We are here to listen. In fact there are only three ground rules, really...*

*First, again, I will not be offering my beliefs, but I will be asking questions to guide the discussion.*

*Second, this will only be helpful if you are honest in your answers. Don’t back off of an idea or thought because you are afraid it might offend me or someone else. I am not offended by disagreement, and I want you to feel the freedom to say ANYTHING, even if everybody in here disagrees with you. With that in mind, please be respectful to each other. I assume you will disagree on some of the issues we’ll discuss. Please keep the discussion focused on the ideas themselves, not on the person making the point. I won’t stand for any verbal attacks that are personal in nature. If we are going to have a helpful and interesting exchange of ideas tonight, it is going to mean that you respect each other’s views, even if you disagree.*

*Last, I promised that this meeting would only last 59 minutes, so I want you to know that no matter who is talking, and no matter what they are saying, I am going to interrupt and end this meeting 59 minutes from now. If you want to hang out and talk after that, that’s fine, but I want to stick to what I promised you regarding time.*

*Oh, by the way, feel free to get up and get some pizza, or to get up and go to the bathroom, or whatever, if you need to... no worries.”*





## 2. The Written Questionnaire Segment

This questionnaire is designed to get the participants thinking about spiritual issues while also allowing others to arrive late without missing any of the discussion. Simply hand them out, and collect them 12 minutes into the focus group, or whenever you are ready to begin the discussion.

## 3. The Discussion Segment

Suggested format:

(after the 12 Minutes for the Written Questionnaire)

47 minutes for the discussion

10 for the 'Life' section

10 for the 'Relationships' section

27 for the 'Religion&Christianity' section

This is the meat of the focus group. On the Basic Focus Group Question List, you will find a list of questions that have worked well in past focus groups. The key to this segment of the meeting is to listen to answers carefully, thinking about follow-up questions you could ask.

If you ask the question, "If there is a heaven, how, in your opinion, does someone get there?" and the group's general consensus is, "By being a good person," a good follow up to ask would be, "How good do you have to be?" This could lead the group to understanding that it impossible to define a fair standard. At this point, the participants may become curious as to what you believe. Resist the temptation to answer any questions.

You will notice on the Basic Focus Group Question List that there are three sections: life, relationships and Christianity. No matter how well the discussion is going, make sure that you don't get bogged down in the first two sections. Leave at least 20 minutes (25 ideally) for the third section, on Religion & Christianity.

You don't necessarily have to plan out how long each question will be discussed. You can simply ask the first question in a Life section, and when the conversation dies down, ask the next one, until you are out of time for that section. Don't worry if you don't get through all the questions. That is not the goal. The goal is to get people thinking.

## 4. Closing the Meeting

When you get to the 59 minute mark, close the meeting, regardless of how well the conversation is going. It is critically important that you stick to what you promised at the beginning. You can easily, if you feel so led, say something like, "Well, we've run out of time, thank you so much, again, for coming. If you'd like to hang around and keep kicking around ideas, feel free, but the meeting is officially over now. If you want to talk about these issues further, I'd love to do so, either in another group setting, or maybe we could get together for lunch. Just let me know you are interested."





After the meeting officially ends, it is your call as to whether or not you want to begin answering the participants questions. Some group facilitators have shared that they have enjoyed some of their best ministry experiences ever immediately after their focus groups ended. Others have chosen to leave the participants hungry, with questions, as a way to draw them back for an investigative Bible study or a lunch appointment. Again, it is your call.

Remember that a successful focus group meeting will often lead students to the realization that some of their beliefs may be inconsistent, illogical, and maybe even wrong. And we have not ever said a word to point that out! This is exactly why focus groups open up so many doors for ministry. When students are asking good questions, and they think you have some answers, you know that the Lord has put you in an extraordinary position.



## FOCUS GROUP QUESTION LISTS

### The Basic (Single) Focus Group

The following are some suggested questions for the Basic Focus Group. Feel free to insert your own, especially if there was an event on campus that everyone seems to be talking about that you could use to get them thinking about values, life, death, God, etc.

You probably will only get to two or three of these questions per section, so make sure to get to the questions you most want to have them discuss. Make a note of which questions you do discuss, in case they are interested in meeting again the next week for a similar discussion. This happens often with the staff- and student-led groups in the Washington, D.C. area.

If you use any questions not listed here that work well, please send an email message to me, Patrick Dennis, at [pdennis@pop.dn.net](mailto:pdennis@pop.dn.net), with the questions you used, and we'll add them here.

### Questions About Life:

1. What do you want out of life? [If they say happiness: How do you define happiness? How do you know it will last? What will it take to ensure that you are happy for life? etc...]
2. Are most [school name] students satisfied with their lives? [Why? Why not? If overwhelming no's, "What is missing?" ]
3. Are some things always right and wrong? [ How do you determine that/how do you know? ]
4. How do you decide what is right or wrong? [ Look here for all sorts of opportunities. For example: someone says "You have to be true to yourself, and look inside for what is right." you could ask "Are you always true to yourself/do you always do the right thing in your own heart?" Why not? If someone says there is nothing that is always wrong, you could say "What about torturing one year-old babies for your personal pleasure?" ]
5. What would you characterize as a wasted life?

### Relationships

1. Do your friends know the real you? [ If no, 'Why not?' or 'What holds you back?' ]
2. Do people love you for what you do or how you perform--or do they love you without condition, just because you are? [ Is college different than high school in that respect? ]



3. Are you more a giver or a taker in your relationships?
4. Have you ever had anyone love you unconditionally? How did/would it effect you?
5. What do you look for in someone you want to date?

### Questions about Christianity and God

(Watch your time carefully here. You want to make sure you at least discuss questions 1, 4 & 5. You might want to introduce this last section by saying something like, "We are going to spend the largest amount of time on this last section, because we really want to hear what you have to say in this area—positive AND negative.")

1. What do you perceive to be the basic message of Christianity? [ Your best answer to these questions is "OK." You are not agreeing or disagreeing, you are just listening. ]
2. What do you like about Christianity as you understand it? [ Looking for answers like it give people peace, security, typical things non-Christians would say about religion. ]
3. What do you dislike about it/it's teachings/its followers? [ Looking for controversial stuff here. Let them get into abortion or intolerance or hypocrisy...but when it does, be sure not fight back or even disagree. Just listen. Let them have their say without trying to defend it. This will (believe it or not) help you greatly in ministering to these folks later. ]
4. Do you believe there is a heaven?
5. If there is a heaven, how—in your opinion—does someone get there?  
[ Be SURE to get to this question. This is a great one, because many many people think by being a good person. Look for opportunities to ask "How good do you have to be?" And "Is that fair?" And if someone responds that a division would not be fair, maybe everyone goes, you can say "Hitler? Manson? etc..." You want to get them to see that there is no fair standard. You can definitely do this by just asking questions... Hopefully this will leave them hungry to hear what you believe later on. Often students will debate about this and come to the consensus that they have no idea what would be fair. ]
6. If God *were* one of us, and you could sit down and interview God over a cup of coffee, and ask him any one or two questions, what would they be?
7. What is your opinion of Christians at \_\_\_[school name]\_\_\_?



## The Three-Week Focus Group Series

(from notes and ideas by Mark Hurt and Gail Stucker)

Here is an expanded list of questions you can use if you decide to go the three week route. Simply focus on one topic per week. Here is an outline:

Week 1: What am I doing with my life? (The 'WHAT' in life issues.)

Week 2: What do I want from the relationships in my life? (The 'WHO' in life?)

Week 3: Why am I here? (The 'WHY' in life.)

### Week One Questions

One reason you are in college is to define what your future will look like. Between the classes you take, the major you select, and how you fill your time, these four years will directly effect your future.

- General Questions:**
1. What brought you to \_\_ [school name] \_\_?
  2. What are you expecting from your experience here?
  3. How will your degree prepare you for the future?
  4. How will the rest of the education prepare you for the future?
  5. How does being here help you get what you want out of life?

- Purpose Questions:**
1. What do you want out of life?
  2. Does a person need purpose to be successful?
  3. How would you define successful?
  4. If you could change one thing about your life right now, what would it be?
  5. With no restrictions, completely unlimited resources, what would you do with your life?
  6. How would you characterize a wasted life?

### Week Two Questions

Our second week will cover three types of relationships. Relationships with your family, with the opposite sex, and with peers. Your experience in these relationships will dramatically effect the relationships in your future and will improve or hinder your goals/purposes in life.

- About Friends:**
1. Would you consider yourself to be an introvert or extrovert? Why?
  2. Who really knows you?
  3. What is your ideal number of close friends?

- About Family:**
1. If you could change one thing about your family/parents, what would it be?
  2. To which of your parents are you the closest?
  3. Given the opportunity to step into your Dad's shoes, what would you do differently?
  4. (Guys) What kind of father do you want to be to your son?
  5. What do you think a daughter needs from her dad?



- Re: the Opposite Sex:**
1. Are you dating anyone now?
  2. What do you look for in someone you date?
  3. How well do you communicate in your relationships?
  4. How well does your boy/girlfriend communicate with you?
  5. What is your favorite aspect of a romantic relationship?
  6. (Guys) How do you romance a woman w/o sex? Could you?
  7. What is the purpose of sex in a relationship?
  8. How reasonable is abstinence until marriage for you personally?
  9. Name some reasons to remain a virgin.
  10. Name some reasons to be sexually active.
  11. What is a monogamous relationship?
  12. Is marriage for a lifetime?
  13. What would you do now to divorce-proof your marriage?
  14. After 50 years of marriage, what character quality would you want your spouse to know you for?

### Week 3 Questions

The third week addresses your ideas about God and his role in your life and environment.

1. On a scale of 1-4, how important is the spiritual dimension of life?
2. On the same scale, how religious are you?
3. Has your spiritual interest increased or decreased since coming to college?
4. Does talking about religious issues energize you or drain you?
5. Are any religious issues 'hot buttons' for you?
6. By what criteria do you make right/wrong decisions?
7. What good or bad decision did you make today?
8. What constitutes a right/wrong decision?
9. How well do you follow your criteria?
10. Do you believe in absolute truth?
11. Do you believe in heaven/hell?
12. Who goes where? Where is the dividing line?
13. Where do you think Adolph Hitler is?
14. Do you believe in sin? What is it?
15. What do you think the percentage breakdown is for you going to heaven? (0% = not going; 100% = going)
16. True/False:
  - God loves everyone.
  - Sin is environmentally induced.
  - There are lots of ways to God.



# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

## About Life...

1. What in your opinion is the basic problem of man (humanity)?
2. Does your philosophy of life (the view of the world you live by) include a solution for this problem? If yes, what is your solution?

## About Relationships ...

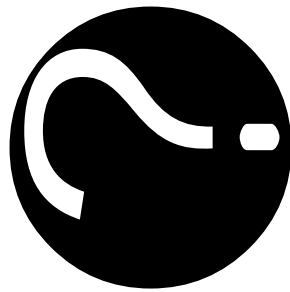
1. What do you think is the most important ingredient in a love relationship? (trust, communication, sex, etc.) Explain why.
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, where do you place the importance of commitment in a love relationship?
3. Should the intent of marriage be for life? Why or Why not?

## About Christianity & God...

1. Rank the following 1 through 6 as to how it has influenced your perception of Christianity.

\_\_\_ Media                      \_\_\_ College classes                      \_\_\_ Family  
\_\_\_ Friends                      \_\_\_ Church/Sunday school                      \_\_\_ Classes before college

2. What do you think makes a person a Christian?
3. If Campus Crusade for Christ were to hold a program for students in this dorm, what topic would you most like to see addressed?



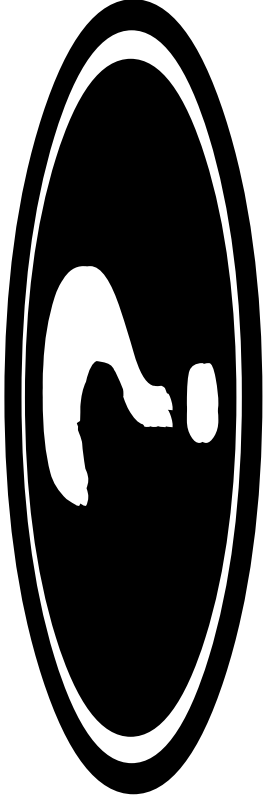
Life. Relationships. Religion.

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

*We want to know.*

[ Replace with time, date, location using  
Times Roman Bold typeface, size 16, printed from  
your computer and pasted over this text. ]





**Life. Relationships. Religion.**  
**What do you think?**

**We know you have opinions.**  
**We want to hear them.**  
**(And that's ALL we want to do.)**

[ Replace with time, date, location info,  
using Courier size 12 text, printed from  
your computer and pasted over this text. ]

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

*We'd Like to Know.*

*We need your help... We want to get your ideas and opinions on three different issues: Life, Relationships, and Religion.*

*Please join us for a Focus Group,*

***10:00-10:59 pm***

***Tuesday Night, August 26th  
in the 5th Floor Study Lounge***

*Though this event IS sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ, we WILL NOT bring our beliefs into the discussion at any time.*

*We will, however, feed you  
**FREE PIZZA,**  
as a way of saying thank you  
for your input.*

*We simply want your opinions, beliefs, and thoughts (even if you think we might disagree).*

This is a sample flier you could use to invite folks. If you want to use this exact one, you will have to replace the time, date and location.

Using any computer with a decent printer, simply type the time on one line, the date on the second, and the place on the third, using the Times Roman typeface, size 18, Bold and Italic. Print those details out of your computer, and simply paste them right over top of those details on this flier. You can then have Kinko's (or whoever prints them) make this a 'two-up' sheet (two fliers on this one page) so the printing is less expensive.

If you don't like it, no problem. Simply make your own...

But if you do choose to use this one, make sure that you actually have free pizza there, since that is what this flier promises...