

Ride 'em Cowboy!

*A fictional interview developed from the May 2010 Mission Study,
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Leader: Today is a very special day. We have with us someone who is part of an unusual ministry. There are people who will probably not come to a traditional church. Bill Howse works with a group of people like that. Let's welcome him to our meeting.

Bill, thanks for coming by.

Bill: It's my pleasure to be here. Thanks for having me.

Leader: Bill, tell us a little about your ministry.

Bill: I am a consultant for church and community ministries for the Arkansas Baptist Convention. I work with cowboy churches. Specifically, I work with Horseback Ministries. It trains pastors for cowboy churches.

Leader: Tell us about cowboy churches. Are they just for cowboys?

Bill: No, our churches are open to anyone. But they are especially for people who are most comfortable around country-western events. We try to reach cowboys, people who take part in horse shows, and people who attend and take part in rodeos.

Leader: Anybody else?

Bill: We try to reach anyone who is comfortable in this environment, whether they own a horse or can ride a horse! We minister to those who are weekend cowboys! They may own a horse but only ride for pleasure on the weekends. So, really, we're open to everyone!

And, families are a big part of our ministry. Many families spend their weekends at rodeos and other equestrian (horse) events. Cowboy churches can reach all the members of a family.

Leader: Tell us about a cowboy church.

Bill: Well, we don't meet in a church building. You may find us in barns, sale arenas, or anywhere cowboys meet. And, we don't always dress the way people in traditional churches do. We're most often in jeans, cowboy boots, and hats. In fact, we may use a boot to take the offering! We don't pass an offering plate. We just put the boot by the door. People give an offering as they leave. Sometimes instead of a boot, it might be a hat!

Leader: What about music? I'm sure you don't have traditional instruments like the piano and the organ.

Bill: *(laughing)* No, we don't. We usually have a country-western band that leads the worship. Sometimes it may be just somebody with a guitar. And, the pastors don't wear suits or ties. Most often we're in blue jeans and cowboy hats! The only time everyone takes their hats off is during the prayer.

Leader: Do you have Sunday School?

Bill: *(Smiling)* Usually we have Bible studies. Often people have to hurry out to take part in one of the events going on. We're very casual.

Leader: What happens when someone accepts Christ and needs to be baptized?

Bill: Not a problem. We may just use a horse trough!

Leader: Is this a growing ministry?

Bill: Oh, yes! Cowboy churches are starting anywhere there are cowboys! For example, Jeff Smith works with cowboys in North Carolina through the Cowboy Church Network. Also there's the Happy Trails Ministry in Kentucky. Of course, Texas has a large number of cowboy churches. So do several other western states. Like I said, wherever there's a cowboy, there's the possibility of a cowboy church.

Leader: Well, we want to thank you for coming by. Before you leave, can you share some prayer requests with us? We might not be cowboys, but we can pray for the cowboy churches.

Bill: Please pray that God will call pastors from people who are part of this culture. Pray that God's Spirit will go before us and prepare the hearts of the cowboys and their families for the gospel.

Leader: Don't the pastors travel a lot?

Bill: Yes, we travel wherever there are shows, rodeos, and 4-H events. Please pray for the safety of the pastors and their families as they travel. You can also pray for financial help for these ministries. In fact, you might ask God if He wants your church to partner with a cowboy church!

Leader: *(to the group)* Choose one of those prayer requests. Let's pray now for this ministry and for those who are a part of it.