

THE  
*Episcopal*  
CHURCH



# Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook



 EVANGELISM  
INITIATIVES

 RACIAL  
RECONCILIATION

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February 2018

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With gratitude to Della Pollock and Hudson Vaughan,  
of the Marion Cheek Jackson Center for Saving and Making History,  
for their kindness, wisdom, and encouragement, and for their generosity  
in sharing resources related to the Listening Out Loud: Performative  
Listening Methodology

With gratitude to the Roadside Theater  
for permission to share resources related to Story Circles

This project was made possible by a grant from the Constable Fund.

Graphic design by Blue + Pine, LLC - [www.blueandpine.com](http://www.blueandpine.com)  
and The Episcopal Church Office of Communications

The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of  
the Protestant Episcopal Church  
815 Second Avenue  
New York, NY 10017

Learn more about the Episcopal Church's Evangelism Ministries and the  
Becoming Beloved Community Vision for Racial Healing, Reconciliation and  
Justice at [www.episcopalchurch.org](http://www.episcopalchurch.org)

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# Introduction

None of us can be whole alone.

Around the time I was in first grade, I remember playing a game my younger siblings and I made up. It was called “Hi, Bob. Thanks for sharing, Bob.” We would sit in a circle in our yellow Little Tikes chairs with a few of our friends: Cabbage Patch Kids, Care Bears, and others. Everyone in the circle—including the stuffed toys and dolls— would stand one at a time to address the group. We always started our talks with this phrase, “Hi, my name is Bob, and I have a story.”

I don’t remember any of the stories we told in that circle, but I remember clearly the rules of the game. We would each take a turn to share a story. After each person finished, they’d sit down and the gathered group would respond, “Thanks for sharing, Bob.”

One day, my mother walked in on us playing this game. After that day, Daddy stopped taking us to his “Hi, Bob” meetings. Though I stopped going to 12-Step meetings, **the StorySharing seed had been planted in me.** It grew like kudzu in the Neuse River Basin, wild and ubiquitous. With those early experiences, the love and the power of sharing stories became the veil hanging over every living thing in my life.

We know that **the shortest distance between two people is a story.** Storytelling has been passed down through the ages as a way to educate, empower, and edify listeners of every age, culture and educational level. Often something new is born in the sacred interaction between the listener and the teller. Indeed, as Jesus demonstrated in countless interactions, God is quite likely to show up in the space between us when we share our stories.

*“What maps cut up, stories cut across.”*

- Michel de Certeau

By listening to another person’s stories—about God, about their greatest hope, about their deepest pain—we learn about their experience and reflect anew on our own. Think of a moment when you heard someone apply a biblical story to his/her life, and suddenly the scripture took on new meaning for you. The fact is, hearing stories connects us to each other in ways that mere text cannot. The oral tradition of storytelling cuts across divides to expose a timeless truth, and promotes the work of personal reconciliation, formation, and transformation.

My early experience with stories has taught me that none of us can be whole alone. We need each other to live life fully. The Hebrew people of the Old Testament knew this and understood the binding and bridge-building power of story. The Patriarchs, Judges, and Prophets told stories of God’s providence and deliverance over and over to an oppressed people living in exile.

**Jesus understood the subversive and deep influence of story.** He used stories to teach profound and eternal truths. Remember his parables? The writers of the gospel would build on this foundation. They crafted the narratives of Jesus’ life, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension to help us develop our trust and love of God. The Annunciation in Matthew, the Baptism of Jesus in Mark, the Road to Emmaus, the Woman at the Well in John’s Gospel, and the story of Thomas’ request to insert his hand into Jesus’s wound in Gospel of John – these stories live in our bodies, gifts from God that can be accessed in times of trial and joy.

Early Christians heard these stories, and through the years, they organized festivals, feasts, and ritualized ways for us to live into the story of God in Christ. Year after year after year, the Church Calendar takes us through the Story of God in creation. Advent, Christmastide, Epiphany, Lent, Eastertide; the Ascension and the Day of Pentecost, Trinity Sunday and Ordinary time (Sunday after Sunday after Sunday of green) guide us until we celebrate Christ the King. These seasons help us to live the Story of a loving, liberating, and life-giving God.

I grew up in the Episcopal Church and have lived my life circling around the Jesus story. Making this cycle via the Church Calendar has driven the story of God deep into my heart. The Jesus Story lives in my bones. **The Jesus Story is my story and your story.**

I invite you to use this Guidebook, because I believe with all my heart that you and your community have something important and vital to say about who God in Christ is this day that only you can communicate. You and your community have something to say about who we are as the people of God in a world that desperately needs those signs of reconciling love. The sharing of those stories is itself the most powerful act of evangelism and reconciliation. I hope that you will share your story.

Our stories speak of God.

Faithfully,

The Rev. Hershey Mallette Stephens  
February 2018

**“OUR  
STORIES  
SPEAK OF  
GOD...”**



# How to Use This Guide

You are reading this Guidebook, so it is safe to assume you have decided to explore storytelling in your context. This Guidebook will help you facilitate the transformative experience of StorySharing. Please note, this is a guide and not a manual or a recipe book. It will facilitate conversation about diversity, community discernment, and conflict resolution, but none of those outcomes is instantaneous. The work of stories is slow and humble stuff. This work is soul-to-soul, person-to-person, heart-to-heart. Much more than brick and mortar, stories are the foundations of churches and communities.

The resources contained in this Guidebook are gathered and/or designed to provide a variety of ways for your community to adopt a StorySharing practice that is authentic to your context. As James Cone writes in *God of the Oppressed*, “Every people has a story to tell, something to say to themselves, their children, and to the world about how they think and live, as they determine and affirm their reason for being. The story both expresses and participates in the miracle of moving from nothing to something, from nonbeing to being.”<sup>1</sup> This Guidebook seeks to help you to share and receive stories of faith, race, and difference in the context of Christian life and in your interactions with the wider world.

## What Is StorySharing?

In StorySharing, we tell our own stories and welcome other’s stories of what matters most. Through StorySharing, you will articulate the many ways you have experienced God’s presence and the many ways you experience your own life, your racial and cultural identity, and the differences God has planted throughout all of creation.

*“For me, a general orientation toward trusting people and a positive attitude toward life and fellow human beings is healthy—not only for one’s peace of mind but also to bring about change.”*

- Wangari Maathai

## Why StorySharing?

You will begin to find language to share what is true and holy and hopeful and challenging and loving with those you encounter in your everyday life. And you will learn about creating hospitable, respectful, generous space for others to do the same.

## How Do We Do StorySharing?

All this talk may sound evangelistic. Well, that’s because evangelism is what disciples do. Evangelism is simply the spiritual practice that allows us to seek, name, and celebrate the loving presence of Jesus in our lives, and to invite the people around us to grow their own relationships with God. We share the love of God we have found in Jesus not to fill our pews or to make the parish budget. We share the love of God so that we may become agents of good news and reconciliation in our churches, communities, and in the world. That is what StorySharing is all about.

**This Guidebook includes several designs for StorySharing, all of which you can customize to your unique ministry context:**

1. Exploratory: Coffee Hour, Bible study, meetings
2. Formation Series for youth & adults: Four to six sessions of 90 minutes each
3. Mini-Retreat: 3-5 hour session
4. Way of Life: Tools for integrating StorySharing into ministry and personal life

## Where Does StorySharing Happen?

StorySharing requires preparation of three separate spaces:

### Physical space:

Set up the room or space where StorySharing will happen. Create a physical space that is conducive for intimate sharing.

### Inner space:

Cultivate a personal posture of receptivity, working to become open to the process and experience.

### Relational space:

Communicate expectations to help participants be in right relationship with each other as they share deeply and honestly in the group. The space between us that gets filled by stories is a sacred and creative space.  
(see Basic Operating Principles, p. 18)

## When Does StorySharing Begin?

You know your people and community best. What is the community's capacity for the work of sharing stories? In general, it may be wise to start with StorySharing within your church, which allows you and your congregation to get to know the practice before hosting a circle from the broader community.

Use Coffee Hour conversation questions to get people talking and sharing

Host a retreat day to introduce StorySharing philosophy and techniques

Invite another church or faith community to participate in StorySharing with you

Invite community partners and neighbors

Based on the interest that surfaces, you might want to make StorySharing a way of life in your community, using it in annual meetings, vestry meetings, and Bible studies as a way to create meaningful connections in your many church gatherings.

# Step I: Reflect

## What Is the Beloved Community StorySharing Campaign?

*“The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption;  
the end is the creation of the Beloved Community.  
It is this type of spirit and this type of love that  
can transform opponents into friends. ...  
It is this love which will bring about miracles  
in the hearts of men.”* -Martin Luther King Jr.

The Beloved Community StorySharing Campaign welcomes and equips Episcopalians and our partners to share about faith, race, and difference ...

within your own congregation, to grow faith and deepen relationships

between Episcopal congregations, especially to engage people of different racial, cultural, socioeconomic, educational, geographic or ideological backgrounds

with friends, neighbors, faith communities, and civic partners, again with special attention to engaging people who are different from the majority culture in your congregation or personal life

Stories have the power to transform communities, unearthing the hidden spiritual and communal resources in a church and in a neighborhood. As we develop our skills and gifts for StorySharing, we become more effective healers, reconcilers, and ambassadors of Christ in the world.

## What Is Beloved Community?

In the “Becoming Beloved Community” vision document, available at [www.episcopalchurch.org/belovedcommunity](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/belovedcommunity), Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and President of the House of Deputies Gay Jennings and their supporting officers set out the Episcopal Church’s long-term commitments to racial healing, reconciliation, and justice. They invite the whole church to a positive vision, that of the Beloved Community:

Beloved Community is the practical image of the world we pray for when we say, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We dream of communities where all people may experience dignity and abundant life and see themselves and others as beloved children of God. We pray for communities that labor so that the flourishing of every person (and all creation) is seen as the hope of each person. Conceived this way, Beloved Community provides a deeply faithful paradigm for transformation, formation, organizing, advocacy, and witness. It’s a vision of a world where oppressed people are liberated from oppression and oppressors are liberated from their need to oppress.<sup>2</sup>

The Beloved Community StorySharing Campaign seeks to honor this commitment by equipping and encouraging Episcopalians to engage in sharing their experiences of faith, race, and difference, becoming agents of reconciliation and healing in their churches and communities.

This process is both evangelism and reconciliation, and the particular method is StorySharing. Every Episcopalian, through the words of our Baptismal Covenant and the promises made during Confirmation, has vowed to practice of evangelism,



## What Is Evangelism?

*Celebrant:* Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?  
*People:* I will, with God's help.

Episcopal Evangelism is simply the ministry of sharing the news that are all loved, welcomed, and a part of the Beloved Community of Christ, and then inviting people to discover and grow their own relationships with God. Many evangelism leaders have together crafted this description of Episcopal evangelism: **We seek, name and celebrate Jesus' loving presence in the stories of all people – then invite everyone to MORE.**<sup>4</sup>

## What Is Reconciliation?

*God calls us to be fellow workers with him, so that we can extend his kingdom of shalom, of justice, of goodness, of compassion, of caring, of sharing, of laughter, joy and reconciliation, so the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.”* - Archbishop Desmond Tutu<sup>5</sup>

Reconciliation is the spiritual practice of seeking loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God and one another, and striving to heal and transform injustice and brokenness in ourselves, communities, institutions and society.

In the Outline of the Faith on page 855 of the Book of Common Prayer, we learn that the mission of the church is “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Jesus Christ.” In other words, reconciliation is the heart of the gospel and of the church's life. The work of reconciliation belongs to all of us.

We need reconciliation and relationship at every level; StorySharing helps us to foster it. As I piloted the Beloved Community StorySharing process, I cannot tell you how many people said, “I have been going to St. Swithins and seeing some of these people for 20 years, and we have never taken the time to share so deeply about our lives.”

## What Are Stories?

Stories are narrative events from the teller's personal experience. Every person, every life is comprised of endless stories. Stories are fashioned from a person's memories, dreams, reflections, moments in time, religious experiences, and more. Stories typically have a beginning middle and end. Stories help us ask questions and seek eternal truths.

## Why StorySharing and Not Storytelling?

Storytelling is used to persuade, to convince, to shape understanding. Storytelling is generally one-way and thus can be transactional. **StorySharing is relational.** It is about engagement and creating connections. In the course of StorySharing we are forging the Beloved Community. We hear a story; it touches our soul and resonates in our heart. We share our story and trust the other person will hold and honor what is true, holy and perhaps painful to us. StorySharing opens the way for authentic conversation and deep-rooted relationships. StorySharing is making an offering of your experiences, doing the brave work of listening to other's experiences, and practicing the way of love.

## Why Should I Share My Stories?

Putting prayerful effort into remembering your experience, telling your story and communicating it well, can produce a wellspring of spiritual wisdom for you and for those who hear your story. Sharing your unique experiences, perspectives and learnings through story can also be an effective resource for the work of reconciliation.

## What Happens to the Stories I Share?

If you choose to record your stories (via digital recording or in writing), you may share it with the Evangelism and Reconciliation ministries at [storysharing@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:storysharing@episcopalchurch.org). With permission, it may be shared as part of broader church-wide efforts to share and celebrate our stories. It will also be preserved in the Episcopal Church Archives as part of the Beloved Community StorySharing Campaign Archive. Your story would be a wonderful gift for the church and for many generations to come.

## How Can We Extend StorySharing Beyond Our Church?

Churches that are energized by StorySharing may connect with other ministries involved in the practice. Link with others near you, and invite them to try the practice and then to host StorySharing circles together with you.

StorySharing churches are also encouraged to reach out and connect with each other across regions, ideologies, cultures, and other dividing lines. Sign up your ministry at [www.episcopalassetmap.org](http://www.episcopalassetmap.org). Beginning in July 2018, you can search “StorySharing” on the Episcopal Asset Map to find other churches interested in pairing up for StorySharing, either in person or using web conference technology or Facebook Live.

## One Last Thing ...

You may be thinking your story is not important, spectacular, groundbreaking, earth-shattering, or interesting enough to be recorded and preserved. Your story does not need to end neatly or wrap up with a happy ending (remember the empty tomb at the close of the Gospel of Mark?). A good story allows people to know you, to connect with your hopes, fears, struggles, joys, and dreams. Listening to someone’s story is a beautiful way to show your love and respect for them. Offering and receiving stories of others is like exchanging the most precious and holy gift one human being could share with another.

“THE  
JESUS  
STORY IS  
YOUR  
STORY...”



# Step 2: Choose Your Path

Five designs are provided to help you implement StorySharing in your context. You may decide to use one, or more, based on your vision for a StorySharing practice in your context.

These questions may be helpful in choosing a design:

Will StorySharing be a new experience in your context, or a somewhat familiar practice?

Who is likely to participate?

Are they likely to be more reserved in their initial participation, or will they jump right in?

What design is the norm in your context, and how likely are participants to commit to a deeper level or engagement (or to make a more significant time commitment)?

The five designs are provided to help you envision implementing the program. You are encouraged to adapt them to your own vision and to what you think will be successful in your setting.

Outlines and scripts for the designs can be found starting on p. 22 of this Guidebook.

## **Exploratory Design #1: Simple StorySharing (p. 22)**

Simple StorySharing is based on the practice of “One-to-One Meetings” made popular by community organizers. Pairs (or other small groups of equal numbers) are able to share during a sermon, Coffee Hour, classes or other gatherings and meetings. It is useful for helping people to gain comfort sharing and receiving stories in and beyond the church.

## **Exploratory Design #2: Our Story in Pictures (p. 24)**

The Exploratory design could be used to introduce the purpose and practice of StorySharing as a means of evangelism and reconciliation in your congregation. If you have 5-15 minutes, use it during a Coffee Hour or as an introduction to a regular Bible study, discipleship class, or church meeting. By using the Exploratory design, you may be able to identify participants who would commit to a deeper level of engagement. You may also find the Exploratory design useful for later StorySharing sessions with groups outside of your church.

## **Formation Series Design (p. 26)**

The Formation Series design is intended as a four-to-six session series for youth or adults. It is intended to last for 90 minutes, and is not recommended for Sunday morning programming between services. Including a meal would make it ideal for a weeknight series, or it could be held on weekend afternoons. It will provide a more in-depth experience of StorySharing than the Exploratory design and could be used to gauge interest in integrating the Way of Life design into your setting.

## **Mini-Retreat Design (p. 29)**

The Mini-retreat design is intended as a three- to five-hour event, featuring an opening exercise in creating a Spiritual Autobiography. It may or may not include a meal. Like the Formation Series design, it will provide an in-depth experience of StorySharing and could be used to gauge interest in integrating the Way of Life design into your setting.

## **Way of Life Design (p. 33)**

The Way of Life design is an integration of StorySharing methods into every aspect of your community life: committee meetings, formation events, outreach activities, etc. It would be adopted once a critical mass of members and leaders are familiar with the StorySharing process.

# Step 3: Choose Your Technique

*Especially if you are serving as a facilitator, you are encouraged to read through all the techniques described below. Even if your ministry chooses to focus or start with one technique, there is unique wisdom in each of the descriptions below.*

## Technique #1: Roadside Theater's Story Circles

This method for sharing stories will be familiar to anyone who has ever sat around with family and/or friends, remembering significant events, recounting histories, and singing songs passed down through the ages. "Story Circles engender appreciation for the unique intellectual, emotional, and spiritual qualities of each participant, and develop oral expression and listening skills."<sup>6</sup> Every story shared is a gift to the listening community. When we are listening deeply we begin to reexamine our assumptions, and (re)discover new and interesting things about the people sitting next to us in the pew, our neighbors, new people, and ourselves.

### About Roadside Theater's Story Circle Methodology

Roadside's ensemble members grew up immersed in the oral tradition, often in ballad form, as part of their shared Scots-Irish heritage. Stories, songs, and shared history shape the content of the plays that the ensemble presents in communities across the United States. Roadside Theater had created 58 plays from the content gathered in Story Circles.

### Why Use Roadside Theater's Story Circles?

Practicing StorySharing using the Roadside Theater's Story Circles technique is a great way for small groups of people (anywhere from 5-16 people) to get to know each other, to share deeply about what the worship community has meant for them, and to share with others about their personal encounters with the Holy. StorySharing using this technique is also helpful for problem solving or community building, as you may collect information that helps the group to reflect, recommend, and implement change.<sup>7</sup>

If you are interested in learning more about Roadside Theater, visit their website:

<https://roadside.org/program/about-roadsides-ccd-methodology>

**“SHARE  
A STORY,  
SPARK A  
STORY.”**



## How To Practice: Story Circle Guidelines

### **There is only one Story Circle facilitator.**

The facilitator explains the Story Circle process, answers questions group members may have, and acts as the timekeeper to ensure that all participants have time to share. For more information, see facilitator guidelines.

### **There are no observers, only participants.**

By joining the Story Circle group, you are agreeing to share. The Story Circle facilitator is also a participant, and must share his or her story, as well.

### **Participants speak only when it is their turn.**

The order of telling is either clockwise or counterclockwise from the first teller. The facilitator will tell the group how long each person has to share their story. For example if there are 12 people in the Circle and 60 minutes for StorySharing, each story should be approximately 5 minutes. Keep in mind your story can be shorter than the time allowed.

### **When it comes to one's turn, the person decides when to speak.**

If you do not wish to speak when it is your turn, you may decide to pass. If you pass, your turn will come around again. After everyone has had the opportunity to speak or pass, the rotation begins again for those who have passed.

### **Listening deeply is the most important part of the experience.**

Listening to another person is a sign of respect. Listen to the stories being shared with the group, and try not to be distracted by thinking about what story you will share. When it is your turn, share a story brought to mind by the previous story or pass.

### **Participants and facilitators never argue with or debate another participant's story.**

Participants and the facilitator never comment upon another participant's story other than to say, when it is their turn, "That story reminds me of ..." and then to shift to telling their own story.

### **There is no cross-talk in a Story Circle**

The term "cross-talk" means interrupting, referring to, commenting on, or using the content of what another person has said during the Story Circle. It also includes participants talking to one another or discussing the story someone has just shared. If participants wish or feel the need to comment, they may do so during their own turn and in story form.

### **Story Circles are never recorded without the participants' permission.**

Recording Story Circles could be really helpful. The stories in a Circle might be used to inform the development of a program or strategy or community offering. If this is the case, all participants must understand this and give permission to have their stories recorded.

### **When a Story Circle should be stopped by the facilitator ...**

It is not unusual for painful stories to emerge in a Story Circle. The facilitator must exercise judgment about when to continue a Story Circle and when to stop it. Story Circle facilitators should not try to serve as therapist, social workers, ministers, or doctors (even if these are their professional occupations), because participants did not come to the circle to receive these services. The facilitator can:

Call for a break and talk individually with the distressed person

Refer the distressed person to the proper professional

Resume or reschedule the Story Circle

## Technique #2: One-To-One StorySharing<sup>8</sup>

This method will be familiar to anyone who has taken part in community organizing or relational organizing. Community organizers bring people together – often across radical differences – on the basis of shared stories and shared hopes. The One-to-One meeting is an intentional, well-framed conversation between two people, and it is the basic building block of all organizing. It connects head and heart, motivation (why we act) and strategy (how we act), and requires us to meet one another with open ears and hearts, sharing and receiving stories of what matters most.

*“The living word has a soul of which the written word is properly no more than an image.”* - Socrates

### Why Use One-To-One StorySharing?

One-to-One StorySharing looks quite simple, but it is a potent tool for community formation and movement building. It helps people to form relationships, to welcome ideas from all ends of the spectrum, to discern where the Spirit is moving, to claim our own callings, to identify our own and others’ gifts and wisdom. If you do it in shorter bursts – such as 1 or 2-minutes per person, sharing around one question – it does not require much time or space preparation. It is a low bar for entering into the rich practice of StorySharing.

### How To Practice: One-To-One StorySharing Guidelines

Introduce StorySharing as part of one or more of these events: the sermon, Coffee Hour, Formation Hour, church meetings, Bible studies, classes, small groups, or other gathering.

Pairs are ideal for most settings. If there are more than two partners, or a small group, be sure there is **adequate and equal** time for each to share (1 to 3 minutes each for spontaneous gatherings, a total of 20 or so minutes each for previously scheduled sessions).

StorySharing is not the same as a regular conversation. **One partner speaks and the other listens**, and then they switch so the listener becomes the speaker and the speaker becomes a listener. Both roles are essential, and both partners should get some experience in each role.

#### As the Speaker:

Keep it real, sharing **real stories** from real life. There’s no need to find specialized language or to sound like an expert storyteller.

Aim for vivid, **sensory-rich storytelling**. Share the story in a way that helps the listener to truly inhabit the space or experience with you. Share about what you saw, smelled, tasted, who was there, where you were, how old you were, what you felt, where in your body that feeling resides, etc.

**Avoid interpreting** or reflecting on the experience, and instead focus on offering the details and sharing the story of the experience itself.

Listen to your own life and **trust your experience**

See if you can notice the **beginning, middle, and end** of your story. Is there a turning point or point at which you needed to make a choice? As you share, be sure to attend to that moment and the experiential details surrounding it.

## As the Listener:

Engage in **active, engaged listening**. Imagine the person speaking is revealing something that is important to your life and faith. Imagine the speaker is one made in the image of God, which means the story you are hearing is holy.

Even if the speaker's time has not yet expired, the listener should not use the pause as an opening to start sharing his/her own reflections. Instead, use the pause to ask **open questions** to help your partner to speak freely and fully and to go deeper with their story. Helpful follow-up questions include: "How did that make you feel?" "I'd like to picture this. What did you see?" or "Please, tell me more."

Offer **generous hospitality** to the speaker. Think about what helps you to share openly and to feel truly heard. What physical gestures or signs indicate full attention and appreciation? Offer these to your partner, as appropriate. (Caveat: If you are from a culture where people lean close and make eye contact to demonstrate attention, but you are receiving the story of someone who is culturally not used to direct eye contact or "close-talking," then adjust your practice. It is okay to ask, "What can I do to make sure you feel you're being heard?")

A detailed script for guiding groups through One-to-One StorySharing is available in the StorySharing Tools section, under Exploratory Design #1: Simple StorySharing on p. 22.

## Technique #4: Listening Out Loud

*Who owns a story? Can someone own a story?*

*How do we get to a place where we are not so anxious about controlling the community narrative?*

*How do we do justice by people stories instead of colonizing someone else's story? <sup>9</sup>*

Once you have some experience with a technique like Story Circles or One-to-Ones, you may try Listening Out Loud, a performative listening methodology. Developed by Della Pollock of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, this technique is a very specific and facilitated way for you to hear a story and share what you have heard.

## About Listening Out Loud

Retelling a story in the first person helps to activate empathy and compassion. When someone shares a story with you, and you return it to them in the first person, you begin to feel how they might have felt, even as you respect the difference between yourself and the person who had the experience. Telling a story you have heard in the first person creates a memory, a memory of which you can be an authentic witness. It helps you to see yourself in the other person's experience and to gain new insight as a result. In this way you are listening as a witness and advocate; certainly not to judge, assess, abstract, even to assimilate someone else's story to your own.

Think of it as similar to the way we read (or re-perform, as Pollock might say) the ancient stories of Holy Scripture at every worship gathering. When we re-tell and re-perform the story of Palm Sunday to Maundy Thursday to Easter, we are engaged in stepping into a story in a profound and intimate way that changes us and changes our relationship to the community who had the actual experience.

Listening Out Loud initiates a horizontal line of communication that is anti-racist, anti-sexist and inclusive. When re-telling someone else's story, we usually use the third person point of view (she, he, her, him, they, their, etc.). The third person point of view takes the person who shared their story out of the conversation. In effect, it sidelines the subject. It may be helpful to remember that gossip is told in the third person. Getting a sense of the power of the story—what the subject of the story is thinking and feeling—it is almost impossible in the third person.

To practice Listening Out Loud you will not use any technology, no recorder, no pens or paper. The only technology you need is the ear and the heart.

## Why Use Listening Out Loud?

Stories are not meant to be hoarded. We store stories by telling them, and re-telling them in community. History is dangerous when it is a solo act. Sharing stories in community creates a chorus out of history. It not only helps us understand who we are, but also who we want to be.

History is just as much about the future as it is about the past. Using this technique facilitates the collective storing of stories that will be resources for your community as you grow and change. This method entails “gathering the past for an ephemeral present and an infinitely unstable future.”<sup>10</sup> Instead of being threatened by change, telling and re-telling stories facilitates participation in change.

These techniques can be used to help prepare your community to interview and record the individual stories that make the collective story of the worship community. Employing the Listening Out Loud methodology is in the tradition of the storytellers and priests who performed the stories of the prophets and the Hebrew people while in Exile; it continues the work of community sages and elders in Indigenous/Native American circles and communities of African descent.

Listening Out Loud also helps you and your community to listen for a change. What does this mean? As Pollock explained in an interview with StorySharing Guide creator Hershey Mallette Stephens on February 2, 2018:

### **Listening for a Change means ...**

instead of talking or even waiting for your turn to talk (while thinking of what to say), you are listening to people and perspectives that haven't yet had a chance to be heard fully or at all.

### **Listening for a Change means ...**

listening in to the other person's deep moments of reckoning. This moment of change/impact/transformation may be part of the story, or it may even occur as a result of the sharing of the story (as when the narrator says something like “Now that I think about it.”)

### **Listening for a Change means ...**

listening in order to be part of a change. This may happen through supporting the person who has shared a story with you on their journey or participating in collaborative action to realize the vision and values embedded in the story or oral history.

### **Listening to be Changed means ...**

as the listener, you are ideally subject to the narrator's telling, which also means the speaker has real power and agency. You are listening in dialogue, not as a passive recipient or as part of a relative transaction (you tell yours, I'll tell mine). Rather, through this process, we make ourselves sufficiently vulnerable to another's history or point of view, and in the process our own histories and views may be transformed.<sup>11</sup>

**NOTE:** This is counter-cultural, which means some people may stumble. Return to the Basic Operating Principles on p. 18 in these cases and remind participants to maintain a posture of grace and flexibility.



## How To Practice: Listening Out Loud Guidelines

### **There is only one Listening Out Loud facilitator.**

The facilitator explains the Listening Out Loud process, reviews first and second and third person points of view (see Facilitator Notes on the next page), answers any questions group members may have, introduces the prompt, and acts as the timekeeper to ensure that each participant has time to share their story. For more on this, see facilitator guidelines.

### **There are no observers – only participants.**

By joining the Listening Out Loud group, you are agreeing to share your story and retell the story your partner shares with you. The Listening Out Loud facilitator is also a participant, in that she is holding the space for participants to immerse themselves in the experience.

### **Participants pair up**

Listen in 5-minute sets. The facilitator sets a timer, and each participant in the pair gets five minutes to share a story. There should be a bit of silence (1 to 3 minutes) in between.

### **“Listen for a Change”**

Do not use any technology, no recorder, no pens or paper. Really listen. Use only the ear and the heart, listen body to body, mouth to ear. Important: this means not scripting or even focusing on verbatim repetition. You may be tempted to “record” a text in your head, to recall when you are retelling. This is not necessary. Retelling needn’t be word for word. As Pollock explains, “Retelling should be directed to all new listeners with full presence.”

### **Get out of an information mindset**

You are not listening for information but listening for feeling, image, gesture, tone and rhythm, pauses, silences, the things left unsaid, interesting words, etc.

### **Retell the story that you heard.**

Reconvene the group. Addressing the group, each participant tells the story he/she heard, in the first person. Begin with, “This is what I heard ...” You are not mimicking the person (copying their accent, etc.). Try to embody the story you just heard, including gestures or unique words helped you to better hear what was being communicated.

## Facilitator Notes on Points of View

StorySharing is best from the first-person point of view. Here is a helpful review to provide to the group, so all participants have a common understanding of the difference between first, second and third person:

### **First person:**

This is when the narrator is referring to him or herself. This is the point of view we use most often when we tell our stories. You will hear “I,” “me,” “my” and “mine” in first person.

### **Second person:**

This is the point of view used when you are referring to the person to whom you’re speaking, or telling someone what or how to do something. “You” is the subject of the second person.

### **Third person:**

This is where the narrator doesn’t refer to him or herself – as in first person – and isn’t addressing the reader – as in second person. Instead, you get an observer’s perspective and lots of “she,” “he,” “her,” “his,” “they,” “their,” etc. Third person is almost like a camera recording the events being shared. Because of that, it can seem more objective than first person or second person point of view. However, although the third person is further removed, that does not make it objective.

## EXAMPLE: The Story of Two Cousins

### Facilitator reads:

Imagine an interview with Brenda, who grew up close to her cousin Francis. They worshiped together at St. Paul's Church in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Brenda shared about one of their experiences at church.

### Participant Volunteer reads:

A telling in the third person: Brenda talked about her cousin Francis' confirmation. She remembered being excited for her cousin. She remembered her cousin's pretty dress, and the bishop's elaborate vestments. After the Confirmation, the congregation said the Eucharistic prayer. People who had been confirmed approached the altar to take Communion. Brenda couldn't take Communion, because she was too young. She watched her cousin receive the bread and the wine. And when her cousin returned to her seat, Brenda leaned over, and asked to smell her breath.

### Participant Volunteer reads:

A telling in the first person: This is what I heard Brenda say: "I was so excited for my cousin. She looked beautiful in her white dress and veil. The bishop came in a pointy hat and huge flowing robes and put his hands on Francis' head. After the Confirmation, we began the Eucharistic prayer. We prayed, and afterward people approached the altar. In those days if you weren't confirmed, you were not allowed to take Communion – you had to wait. I was a year younger than Francis, so I had to wait. I watched as Francis went up and received the bread and then the wine. When she came back to sit next to me, I leaned over and said to her, "Francis, open your mouth. I want to smell your breath." She asked, "Why?" I told her, "If I can't taste Jesus, then I want to smell Jesus."

# StorySharing Tools

## Basic Operating Principles for Cultivating an Environment of Respect and Justice <sup>12</sup>

Regardless of the technique you choose, certain principles should shape every experience of StorySharing.

### 1. Listen. Then listen again. Then listen again.

Listening to someone is a way to show respect for the person and their experience. Listen for pause, rhythm, withdrawal, silence, and emphasis, not just informational data. Work hard not to interpret, to over identify, or evaluate and test what is being shared. Listen with ears that hear. Listen to be transformed by what you are hearing.

### 2. Assume response-ability.

I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of Jesus always to be there. And for that I am responsible.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Beware good intentions.

These can be rooted in the assumption that there is a “right” way to do something and in good-for-you goals that confound the radical work of community-first leadership.

### 4. Resist the temptation to use Prayer Book-speak

It is easy to say, “The Episcopal Church welcomes you” and “We will respect the dignity of every human being.” This is beautiful language which has come to us through tradition. Take the time to parse these dense statements. If you find you want to quote the Book of Common Prayer, go deeper. Ask yourself, why does a particular line from the BCP resonate with you? Is it the best way to communicate your idea(s) about the subject? Are there other words that could capture the experience in a more personal and accessible way?

### 5. Criss-cross differences

Make a mess of lines of conventionally distinguishing race, class, religion, ancestry, community, etc. Make a fool of yourself. Ask questions. Expect in turn to get bumped and bruised.

Those conventional lines keep us secure and separate in our differences. Consider: what if we neither ignored difference nor reiterated categorical differentiation in our daily practices? What if difference was at the center rather than the periphery of all social relations, as a gift to be shared and not a problem to be navigated?

## Sample StorySharing Prompts

Below are a few prompts that can help to open discussion about faith, race, identity, values, etc. – topics that are hard to talk about without a deep grounding in active, faithful listening. Keep in mind that you don't need a diverse group of participants to make StorySharing valuable, or even to engage issues of race, difference and reconciliation. If you share stories openly and vulnerably, and listen bravely, you will see God more clearly and form Beloved Community.

*“To become and to be a Christian is ... the knowledge that there is no pain or privation, no humiliation or disaster, no scourge or distress or destitution or hunger, no striving or temptation, no wile or sickness or suffering or poverty which God has not known and borne for [us] in Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup> - William Stringfellow*

Choose one of the Prompts below or one of the fuller Centering Reflections. You can always write your own!

### About Faith / Church-Related Setting

Some people find it hard to believe in God. Share a story about an experience that taught you something about the power of faith in Jesus.

“Love allows us to enter paradise.”<sup>15</sup> Share a story about a time someone made you feel loved.

Reinhold Niebuhr said, “Nothing that is worth doing can be done alone, but has to be done with others.” Share a story about a time you worked with other people of faith to achieve a goal that was important to you. What did you learn about God and yourself in the process?

Share a story about how have you made use of your sufferings, difficulties, and/or hardships in order to help someone else facing similar troubles

Do you consider yourself a worker with God? Share a story about a time you felt you were working with God to do something.

We praise God with the “communion of Saints” and with “all the company of Heaven.” Share a story about someone who has died with whom you still feel connected through prayer or another act of faith.

Peace of heart and mind come from a power greater than ourselves. Share about a time when you have felt the peace of Christ.

No person ever amounts to much, until they learn to appreciate their origins. Share a story about the first person that took you to Church or significantly informed your faith.

Share a story of a compelling experience of the holy or of God.

Recall the story of when you knew this church was your home.

When have you felt God really alive in your church (perhaps in the last month)? Describe that moment.

## About Faith / Secular Setting

Share a story about when you felt really connected to a community, the world, the universe, or something greater than yourself?

Share a story about the people or groups that help to lift your spirits?

When you are really part of a group, how do you feel? Share a story about an experience in a group.

How have you used spiritual or meditative practices – prayer, meditation, deep breathing, etc. – in your life? Have they ever been useful to you for dealing with a challenging experience? Share a story about using these practices.

Share a story about the first time you visited a place of worship that was different than the faith tradition you grew up in.

## About Race and Identity

Share a story about your first memory of experiencing color or race.

Share a story of a time when you were in a context where you did not know the language spoken around you.

Share a story of a particular moment when your racial, cultural or ethnic identity was not the same as most of the people around you.

Share a story about a time when you felt especially powerful.

Share a story about a time when you felt especially powerless.

Share a story about an experience of abundance.

We may live in close contact with neighbors and friends but still feel alone. Share a story about a time you felt lonely.

## About Difference

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3.28) Share a story about a time you saw God in someone very different from yourself.

Share a story about when you were a stranger and someone offered you hospitality.

Share a story about a time when you felt most at home.

Share a story about a time when you felt left out, like your voice and presence did not matter.

Share a story about when you experienced difference as something painful.

What is your most important relationship with someone quite different from you (geography, culture, ethnicity, ideology, gender, sexual orientation, age)? Share a story an important moment in that relationship.

Share the story of a moment when you learned something or had your mind changed by someone very different from yourself.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans it is written, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (12:2) Share a story about a time you felt Jesus changing your mind about someone or some thing.

## Sample Centering Reflection

### “Come and See”

They say every preacher has one sermon. Perhaps Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s one sermon was “Come and See”. Come and see Jesus in your neighbor, in the school children in the south, in garbage workers in Memphis, Come and see Jesus in those living in poverty in the richest country in the world, Come and see Jesus in the Vietnamese children, women, and men being slaughtered in the name of empire. King was asking the people of God to come and see.

In a speech given April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York City (exactly one year before his assassination in Memphis), he said:

“I am convinced that if we are to get on to the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

“A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life’s roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life’s highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”<sup>16</sup>

- *Rev. Martin Luther King Jr*

Come and see that thoughts and prayers, and benevolent acts will not bring the Kingdom of God. In other words, King is saying to us would-be disciples, “Come and see that our society is in need of a revolution.” King described his vision of revolution as the Beloved Community.

Has someone ever invited you to “Come and See”? What were you doing when the invitation was extended? What did you experience? What effect did your experience have on your life?

“Share a story about a time you were invited to “Come and See.”

## Exploratory Design Tools

*Can you hold that space open for me?*

*Can you keep your questions and suggestions and judgments at bay*

*Can you wait with me for the truths that stay hidden behind my sadness, my fear, my forgetting, and my pain?*

*Can you just hold open a space for me to tell my story?<sup>217</sup>*

*Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Rev. Mpho Tutu*

The Exploratory design could be used to introduce the purpose and practice of StorySharing in your congregation or to test it in wider circles. Use it as part of an established gathering like Coffee Hour or as an introduction to a regular Bible study, meeting or class. Participants who would commit to a deeper level of engagement with StorySharing may be identified through the Exploratory design.

### Exploratory Design Tool #1: Simple StorySharing

Many of us avoid evangelism because – though we’ve spent years in church – we don’t have practice talking about our life with God. These basic yet powerful StorySharing tools introduce the concept and help us to develop a basic comfort with sharing and receiving stories.

<b>Time Frame:</b>	4-15 minutes
<b>Technique:</b>	One-to-One StorySharing, using Story Prompts like those on p. 19
<b>Target Audience:</b>	Church members – young and old – and ministry partners
<b>Set-up:</b>	Appropriate for any group gathering: worship, fellowship, classes, meetings, & more

### Simple StorySharing in a Group Setting

During a **sermon**, invite people to pair off and share around a related topic

During **Coffee Hour**, call for a pause and invite people to do StorySharing “Round-Robin” style, in 2-minute rounds (1 minute/person). People will pair off, share around a simple story prompt in a brief round, and thank each other when the time is called. They can then search for a new partner, to share around the same question or a new one.

At the start of **church meetings, small groups, or classes**, do one round of StorySharing in pairs, small groups of equal size, or with the whole group. Each person may speak for 1 or 2 minutes.

During **Formation Hour** between or following worship services, try 6-minute rounds (3 minutes/person) to explore particular issues that are important to the church.

Include One-to-One StorySharing as part of **more diverse group gatherings** (civic, interfaith, etc.), always in cooperation with the leaders of other organizations present.

## Leading the Session

Consider the following process for guiding a group through Simple One-to-One StorySharing. Feel free to revisit the Guidelines on p. 13 for additional support:

1. Inform the group that they will have the opportunity to practice One-to-One StorySharing, a brief time to offer your story and listen to the story of another person, and to hear and see God in our stories.
2. Invite people to form pairs, so that each person has the opportunity to speak when it is their turn. Do not be surprised if this requires some extra urging and facilitation – people are not used to being invited to move around in new or particular ways.
3. If anyone chooses not to speak but only to listen, they may ask to join a group as a witness, with the group's permission.
4. Once the pairs have formed, inform the group how long each partner will have to share. This is generally 1 to 3 minutes for each partner, for a total of 2 to 6 minutes.
5. Offer the Story Prompt. See the sample list of prompts on p. 19 of this Guidebook or create your own. Give people at least 1 minute to ponder their story and to get in touch with multi-sensory details surrounding the experience, so their partner will feel as if they're experiencing it, too.
6. Invite the partners to determine who is Partner A and who is Partner B. In the first round, Partner A will speak and Partner B will listen.
7. Announce when it is time to begin and encourage folks to start sharing.
8. Provide a clear, vocal time-check when Partner A has 20 seconds left to speak.
9. Provide a second clear, vocal time-check when Partner A's time is up, and ask people to stop talking. If the room is full of energy and people don't want to stop, remind them they can set up a time to continue the conversation.
10. Once the whole group has quieted, invite Partner A to become the listener, while Partner B becomes now becomes the speaker. Remind people that this exercise is about mutuality, which means both partners should receive the gift of serving as both the speaker and the listener.
11. Repeat the story prompt and the time allotted, and invite Partner B to offer the story and Partner A to listen.
12. Repeat the clear, vocal time-check when Partner B has 20 seconds left and again when time is up.
13. Now that both partners have had a turn, call time on the session. Invite the pairs to thank each other in whatever way is appropriate for them: a high five, a handshake, a smile, a bow, a hug, a "thank you" or "amen" or something else entirely.

## Try Out Simple StorySharing in Longer Form

### **Go Deeper Within the Church:**

Enrich the church's relational culture by organizing a one-month StorySharing campaign in your church. Create a board on the wall or online with every member's name, and invite people to sign up with each other to do two 30-minute StorySharing sessions ideally with two members they don't know well.

### **Connect Beyond the Church:**

You're already connected with people who are not part of your church. They may be close to you (family or friends), regular acquaintances (work colleagues, school mates, neighbors, volunteer partners, people you know but with whom you disagree, etc.) or further from your circle (neighbors you do not know, people who help you or receive service from you, members of a different organization, etc.). Many of them are eager for respectful, mutual conversation.



How do you issue that invitation? Make it genuine. Get in touch with your own desire to build relationship and hear the other person's story. For example, you might say, "Our ministry is listening to our neighbors, because we know things have changed here. I'd love to hear your story and questions and share my own. Could we talk soon for half an hour?"

## EXPLORATORY DESIGN TOOL #2: Our Story in Pictures

<b>Time Frame:</b>	5-15 minutes
<b>Target Audience:</b>	The regular participants in the selected event.
<b>Materials Needed:</b>	10-12 printed photos from parish celebrations of Easter through the years. Alternatively, you may choose to use photos from the parish family retreat, or any other regular event in your parish. The goal is to select photos that capture a variety of people who would be recognized by different people in the congregation, over a span of time.
<b>Setup:</b>	Setup for this event is intended to be simple and "no frills." Set out a long table in the center of the area where people will gather - it should be "in the way," not "out of the way" - and display the photos randomly on the table.

You will find the outline that best fits your context; but consider the following for this short session:

### Introduction

As people come together for this established gathering, allow them to freely discover, explore, handle and talk about the photos. Listen for phrases and stories you may use during your explanation (below). When participants have had a few minutes to notice and engage the photos, convene the group.

### Facilitator Script

Share the following, or make these points in your own words.

By now most of you have noticed and commented on the photos on the table here. I've really enjoyed watching and listening to you. This has been our first experience of StorySharing, a process that is being tried across the Episcopal Church as a way for us to become more comfortable sharing our stories and the stories of our faith.

You see, when we say something like, "that's so-and-so... I remember when she was that age... where did they move to?" [use something you overheard here] we're starting a story. Stories are about people and places and experiences, and when we share them, everyone gets a new and different perspective because of the stories we have shared. The stories we've shared today are about Easter celebrations here in our community through the years, but they could also be about things that are more personal, like how we have seen and experienced Jesus here, or more challenging, like when we have felt excluded, or who might feel excluded today.

We're doing this today to see what's easy for us, and what's hard. From this we'll decide how we next want to explore StorySharing here in our community, who wants to be involved, and how we want to join in the conversation that's happening across the church."

### Exploring More Deeply

Feel free to follow with a Simple StorySharing exercise from Exploratory Design #1. You might also choose to make this invitation ...

Let's try StorySharing again, with a little more direction. Find a partner, and take no more than three minutes each to tell each other about: (choose one)

Your first Easter here. What's the most vivid memory you have of that day? If you haven't yet been here for Easter, to what are you most looking forward?

So you remember your baptism? Share a story about your baptism. If you were baptized as an infant, tell a story that has been told to you about that day.

Did anything memorable happen at your Confirmation or Reception into the church? Share a story about that experience, whether about the service or about your preparation.

Be sure to notice who is most highly engaged and enthusiastic, as well as what works well in this community and what is awkward. Keep the time and stop the conversation after three minutes.

Explain that it is time for the person who listened first to share. If time permits, invite participants to find a new partner. Repeat the process with a new prompt.

## Wrapping Up

Thank everyone for participating. Promise to be in touch about next steps for exploring StorySharing. Conclude with one of the prayers from the "Prayers for the Experience" section of the Guidebook, or a prayer of your own hope for the process:

## Alternative Set-Ups

If photos are not available, consider making tent cards with labels like, "Easter 1990," "Easter 2000," "Easter 2010," etc. Or collect objects, such as a candleholder, a figure from the creche, an old offering plate, a tile from the kitchen, etc.

## Formation Series Design Tools

A four- to six-session StorySharing Formation Series will allow your congregation to explore and practice several methods of StorySharing, and to engage in evangelism and racial reconciliation as a community. The series should be scheduled at a time that will allow 90 minutes for content; if a meal is included, two hours should be reserved. You may expect that committed StorySharing leadership will emerge from the series, along with themes and practices to integrate into the Way of Life for your congregation or ministry.

<b>Time Frame:</b>	90 minutes to 2 hours
<b>Target Demographic:</b>	Youth or adults; any interested community member. This design is engaging for both youth and adults. Decide whether youth and adults should meet separately or together, based on the practice of your community and opportunities you perceive.
<b>Purpose:</b>	To engage and experience the practice of StorySharing in community; to identify areas for racial reconciliation work; to adopt a StorySharing practice in the community.
<b>Materials Needed:</b>	No materials are needed for StorySharing beyond the basic setup (see below). Materials may be needed for the closing activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Post-it Prayer: Post-it notes and a poster or newsprint sheet.</li><li>• Pick up a stone: an attractive bowl and a selection of smooth stones, enough for each participant to take one.</li><li>• Commitment: slips of paper or index cards, enough for each participant to take one, and a bowl to collect them.</li></ul>
<b>Setup:</b>	For this design, you will need a meeting place that is large enough for all participants to sit in a circle, in chairs. If your gathering includes a meal, the eating space may be either separate or integrated into the meeting space.

You may adapt this outline to best fit your context; however, it is recommended that each session include the following:

### Welcome

Welcome the group using this script, other language from the Guidebook, or your own words:

Welcome to our StorySharing series. StorySharing is a practice that allows everyone to offer and receive our stories about the things that matter the most. Through StorySharing we will learn how to talk about the many ways that God has loved us, begin to find language to share that love with people we encounter in every place, and share about our experiences of race, identity and difference.

### Introductions

If your gathering includes a meal, invite participants to eat with someone they know less well and introduce themselves, saying (adapt as you wish) name, place of birth, how many places they have lived, and how long they have lived in the area. If there is no meal, invite participants to go around the circle and introduce themselves, as above.

## Prayer

Use one of the prayers from the “Prayers for the Experience” section of the Guidebook, or a prayer describing your own hope for the process.

## Introduction of the Method

The Story Circle method is recommended for this design. If you want to try the Listening Out Loud method detailed in the online handouts, you may want to do so in a later session.

Introduce the method using this script, or adapt it to your own words:

We will be taking turns sharing a story, responding to a basic prompt, and listening deeply and respectfully to the stories shared with the group.

## Guidelines

Carefully review the Story Circle Guidelines in the Guidebook. Some are for your own use (example: When a Story Circle should be stopped by the facilitator), but most should be translated into the first person and shared with the group (example: “I am the facilitator. It is my job to explain the process, answer questions and keep the time as we each speak.”) Explain that there are some basic guidelines that will ensure that everyone participates fully, and everyone feels safe. Read the guidelines as you have prepared them.

## Basic Operating Principles

Carefully review the Basic Operating Principles for Cultivating an Environment of Respect and Justice. Discern what they mean to you and adapt to your own words where necessary. Explain that there are some basic principles for cultivating an environment of respect and justice. Read the Basic Operating Principles as you have prepared them.

## StorySharing

Invite someone to be the first teller and to respond to the prompt. Explain that the movement will be clockwise (or counter-clockwise if you prefer) from the first teller. Remember to keep the time for each person. Use an alarm or tone to save you from interrupting speakers. Be polite but firm. Repeat the prompt, as necessary, as the StorySharing continues.

If someone hesitates, remind the group that anyone may choose to pass, and that their turn will come around again. After everyone in the circle has had the opportunity to speak or pass, begin the rotation again for those who have passed.

## Prayer

When everyone who chooses to participate has done so, close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the gathering, for the stories shared, for the deep listening that happened. Ask God to bless all who were there and to be with them throughout the week, until the next meeting.

## Closing

Choose a closing exercise below and invite the group to participate. Remind everyone of the next meeting date and time.

### **Post-it prayer:**

Distribute post-it notes and invite each participant to write a brief prayer for the group. The prayers may be thanksgivings for what has happened today, or petitions for how God might be present in the group for subsequent meetings. Invite participants to post their prayers on the piece of newsprint or poster board provided.

### **Pick up a stone:**

Offer the bowl with attractive stones to the group. Invite each participant to think of one word they hope for the group and to carry the stone with them throughout the week and pray the word whenever they encounter the stone. Suggest they keep it in a pocket or bag, or on their dresser, desk or table.

### **Commitment:**

Invite the participants to reflect deeply on how a StorySharing practice may be integrated into their community, and how they may use it in the ministry(ies) in which they are involved. Distribute slips of paper and invite each participant to write a commitment on the sheet and sign it, leaving it in a bowl on the table. (Note: this activity is recommended for the final session in the series).

## Mini-Retreat Design Tools

The Mini-retreat design is intended as a three- to five-hour event, and features not only StorySharing but the creation of a Spiritual Autobiography. It may or may not include a meal. Like the Formation Series design, it will provide an in-depth experience of StorySharing and could be used to gauge interest in integrating the Way of Life design into your church's life.

<b>Time Frame:</b>	3-5 hours
<b>Target Demographic:</b>	Adults and interested community members
<b>Purpose:</b>	To engage and experience the practice of StorySharing in community; to help participants to delve more deeply into their own stories and notice the presence of God; to adopt a StorySharing practice in the community.
<b>Materials Needed:</b>	<p>Paper (ideally 11 x 14 or 11 x 17, though 8 ½ x 11 will also work – enough for all participants)</p> <p>Writing instruments for each participant. You may also choose to have colored pencils, markers or crayons available, for people who wish to get more creative with their Spiritual Autobiographies</p> <p>Optional: journals for each participant to capture stories from their Spiritual Autobiographies</p> <p>For closing activities, see instructions and materials in the Formation Series on p. 26.</p>
<b>Setup:</b>	For this design, you will need a meeting place that is large and comfortable enough for all participants to sit in a circle, in chairs. You may also choose to have a separate set-up around tables, so that people can create their Spiritual Autobiographies while sitting at tables.

You may adapt this outline to best fit your context; however, it is recommended that the retreat include the following:

### Welcome

Welcome the group using this script, other language from the Guidebook, or your own words:

Welcome to our StorySharing retreat. StorySharing is a practice that allows everyone offer and receive one another's stories about the things that matter most. Through StorySharing we will learn how to talk about the many ways that God has loved us, begin to find language to share that love with people we encounter in every place, and share about our experiences of race, identity and difference.

### Introduction

Invite participants to go around the circle and introduce themselves, saying (adapt as you wish) name, place of birth, how many places they have lived, and how long they have lived in the area.

## Prayer

Use one of the prayers from the “Prayers for the Experience” section of the Guidebook, or a prayer of your own hope for the process.

## Introduction to StorySharing Retreat

Use this script to introduce the purpose of the retreat/workshop, or come up with your own words to set the scene:

Jesus of the Gospels is all about changing lives, changing communities, changing culture, changing religious practice and ultimately changing reality. We tell our stories to work with Jesus to bring about loving, liberating, life-giving relationships with God, ourselves, others, and all of creation. Every time you tell your story, you give honor to the Creator. Through StorySharing we learn, love, and give life to others. Your story is the story of God.

## Introduction to Spiritual Autobiography

Further draw people into the retreat by explaining the concept and practice of spiritual autobiography. Feel free to use the language below, or come up with your own words to set the scene:

*We will engage in noticing just how much God is present in our stories by creating our own spiritual autobiographical timelines. An autobiography is an account of a person’s life written by that person. Spiritual Autobiographies focus specifically on how you have encountered God in your life.*

*We may encounter God (also known as the Holy One or our Higher Power) in many ways. Some of the ways we become aware of God include (1) religious or communal rituals, like Baptism, Holy Communion, and other sacramental rites; (2) Scripture and other written or recorded accounts of spiritual experiences; (3) a personal religious experience. The words to describe this meeting vary; sometimes it is called an encounter; sometimes, a confrontation; and sometimes, a sense of Presence.*

*We will trace that experience of God’s Presence using the principle of Sankofa.*

*The Sankofa Heart is a Ghanaian symbol that means: “We should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us, so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward. Whatever we have lost, forgotten, forgone, or been stripped of can be reclaimed, revived, preserved, and perpetuated.”<sup>18</sup>*

*That raises important questions for us here. Consider these big questions now:*

- How has God shown up in your life?*
- How is Jesus or his teachings a part of your life today?*
- What rituals or ceremonies have you participated in that were designed to evoke the presence of God?*

*Think through the major moments in your life when you have felt close to God and perhaps when you’ve felt distant from God. Pay special attention to the highs, lows and major turning points in your overall life story. For each major encounter – or struggle – with God, place a dot or an image on the timeline to capture what happened.*

### Life Events

- Births (your children’s, what you’ve heard of your own)*
- First meetings*
- Graduations*
- Goodbyes*



## Moves

- Trips
- Sobriety dates and milestones
- Illness and recovery
- Marriage or relationship milestones
- Deaths

## Religious Rituals and Events:

- Baptisms
- Confirmations
- Weddings
- Ordinations
- Funerals
- Retreats
- First time in current church or first time in formative church
- Mission trips

## Community Events:

- Political events (marches and rallies, presidential inaugurations, elections)
- National tragedies (Challenger explosion, 9/11, Columbine, Ferguson, etc.)
- Social or cultural rites of passage

*When you've got your timeline, go back and reflect on these moments of encounter with God. See if you can recall the stories for any of these moments. As you recollect, try these guidelines:*

*Revisit the details: what you saw, felt, smelled, tasted, who was there, where you were, how old you were, etc.*

*Keep it real: there's no need to find specialized language or to sound like an expert*

*Listen to your own life and trust your experience*

*Turn your focus to God: Peer past "I felt peaceful" and ask what made you sense you were with God or that God was the source of your peace. What are the signs of the loving presence of God – the Creator, Son and/or Spirit – with you?*

As the facilitator, you may invite participants to take journals and capture a few stories. They may also illustrate their timelines with images and other words that capture the essence of their experience.

You may wrap this portion of the retreat by asking the group to offer comments in response to a question, such as:

What did you discover as you completed your Spiritual Autobiography?

How did it feel to reflect on God's presence in this way?

The facilitator should then offer a prayer, either one that rises spontaneously, a prayer created for the occasion, or one of those in Prayers for the Experience on p. 34.



## StorySharing Guidelines

Carefully review the Guidelines for whichever StorySharing technique you will now use. Explain that there are some basic guidelines that will ensure that everyone participates fully, and everyone feels safe. Read the guidelines as you have prepared them.

## Basic Operating Principles

Carefully review the Basic Operating Principles for Cultivating an Environment of Respect and Justice. Discern what they mean to you and adapt to your own words where necessary. Explain that there are some basic principles for cultivating an environment of respect and justice. Read the Basic Operating Principles as you have prepared them.

## Sharing Our Stories

Follow the instructions for the StorySharing Practice you wish to incorporate at this point. Time permitting, you may choose a combination of them. It is best to save Listening Out Loud for later in the retreat, and to explain the process with care.

## Prayer

Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the gathering, for the stories shared, for the deep listening that happened. Ask God to bless all who were there and all those who are part of their stories.

## Closing

Choose and adapt a closing exercise from the set described on p. 28 for the Formation Series.

*“I always think that the question is like a lantern. It illuminates new landscapes and new areas as it moves. Therefore, the question always assumes that there are many different dimensions to a thought that you are either blind to or that are not available to you. So, a question is really one of the forms in which wonder expresses itself. One of the reasons that we wonder is because we are limited, and that limitation is one of the great gateways to wonder.”<sup>20</sup>*

*-John O'Donohue*

## Way of Life Design Tools

Several of the practices already mentioned in this Guidebook are especially useful for congregations and ministries that wish to build StorySharing into their way of life. These include:

Regularly incorporate StorySharing into sermons, Coffee Hour, Formation Hour, church meetings, Bible studies, classes, small groups, or other gatherings.

Launch an annual One-to-One StorySharing Campaign for the whole church. Create a board on the wall or online with every member's name, and invite people to sign up with each other to do two 30-minute StorySharing sessions ideally with two members they don't know well.

Truly become part of the Beloved Community StorySharing Campaign by connecting to another church engaged in StorySharing – perhaps one that is distinct from yours in terms of geography or dominant ideology, culture, race, age, etc. If you both have access to Facebook Live or web conferencing technology like Skype, Zoom or AdobeConnect, it isn't difficult to build these bridges. Beginning in July 2018, the Episcopal Asset Map will feature StorySharing ministries so you can find each other. Sign your ministry up at [www.episcopalassetmap.org](http://www.episcopalassetmap.org).

### Roadside Theater's "Just to Jar Your Memory—A Dozen Questions" <sup>19</sup>

Our respective personal and family stories will also illuminate larger, communal stories. Communal stories can tell us how our church or worship community was founded, what hardships and challenges it has faced and is facing, and where and how the community finds joy.

To find the answers to these questions about the whole community, the community will need to commit to collecting stories over time. It is important when conducting interviews in your community to talk to a diverse cross-section of people. Interview young people, elders, staff, leaders, the quiet but faithful, the list goes on and on. There are a wealth of stories in your church.

Share these questions with members of your community to prime the pump and get folks ready to share their stories of faith, race, and difference:

1. Who is the oldest member of your family living now?
2. Who is the oldest member of your family that person remembers?
3. Can you remember one story about this oldest family member?
4. Does that person remember a story about an older family member?
5. Does that person remember any old song or ballads they sang in church? Learn it or write it down.
6. After you've found out any and all stories available to you from your own family, ask them if they know anyone else who is a storyteller who might remember something they've forgotten. Go talk to this person and learn new stories.
7. Who was your favorite storyteller as a child? Why? What was the best story they told? Tell it.
8. What is your favorite story about your own childhood you like to remember and tell?
9. What was your favorite place to play as a child? Why did you play there?
10. When you were young, what were some scary stories that grownups told you to make you behave?
11. Times have changed. What practice or way of life from your own childhood do you wish was still present or in use now?
12. What are some reasons you feel StorySharing might be important?

# Prayers for the Experience

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

~ Prayer for the Human Family, Book of Common Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we come before you as a people of God, seeking to join your transforming work in the world.  
Open our eyes to see the movement of your Spirit.  
Open our minds to imagine new possibilities.  
Open our ears to hear the voices of all your children.  
Open our mouths to speak with honesty and love.  
Open our hands to share all that we have.  
Open our hearts to receive all that we need.  
Thank you, Lord, for calling us as your disciples and friends.  
Give us courage to follow where you lead. Amen.

~ A prayer for new mission strategy from the Diocese of Massachusetts

For long years I have kept this beauty within me,  
It has been my life.  
It is sacred.  
I give it now that coming generations may know the truth  
About my people.  
I give it as the dew falls.  
I give it as sacred pollen,  
That there may increase a better understanding among men.  
My days have been long.  
Whoever reads and loves and learns from these stories  
Shall profit by them,  
And their days shall be lengthened.  
I give these in the spirit of generosity  
Asking that no harm will come from the Powers  
Who have given these stories to us.  
May no harm come from them.  
May they be accepted as an offering,  
As the pollen,  
As the dew.

~ The Storytellers Prayer, Navajo

Gracious and loving God, your Son Jesus Christ shared stories to show us your kingdom.  
Be with us now as we learn to share our own stories and help us to use StorySharing to grow more deeply into the Beloved Community you would have us be. Amen.

~ Day Smith Pritchett

Almighty God, You bring to light things hidden in darkness and know the shadows of our hearts.  
Cleanse and renew us by Your Spirit, that we may walk in the light and sanctify Your name through Jesus the Messiah, the Light of the world. Amen.

~ The Kenyan Book of Common Prayer

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, Christ may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Amen.

~ Ephesians 3:16-19

# Engaging the Church-wide StorySharing Campaign

1. This Guidebook is available for download in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole at [www.episcopalchurch.org/StorySharing](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/StorySharing).
2. Project Lead Hershey Mallette Stephens will serve through August 2018, helping to orient dioceses to the practice of StorySharing. She is also organizing a team of StoryWeavers –multilingual young leaders trained in StorySharing and live in the U.S. and Latin America. Beginning in April 2018, they will be available to lead StorySharing trainings and orientations. They will also fan out to gather and record stories in their communities. Learn more by contacting Rev. Stephens at [StorySharing@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:StorySharing@episcopalchurch.org).
3. StorySharing churches are encouraged to reach out and connect with each other across regions, ideologies, cultures, and other dividing lines. Sign up your ministry at [www.episcopalassetmap.org](http://www.episcopalassetmap.org). Beginning in July 2018, you can search “StorySharing” at the Episcopal Asset Map to find other churches interested in pairing up for StorySharing, either in person or using web conference technology or Facebook Live.
4. If you choose to record your stories digitally or in writing, the church’s Evangelism and Reconciliation ministries will collect them at [StorySharing@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:StorySharing@episcopalchurch.org). With permission, they may be shared on The Episcopal Church’s web and social media platforms as a celebration of our stories. Submitted stories will be preserved in the Episcopal Church Archives.

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# End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*.
- <sup>2</sup> Presiding Officers of the Episcopal Church, "Becoming Beloved Community: The Episcopal Church's Longterm Commitment to Racial Healing, Reconciliation and Justice," May 2017, [www.episcopalchurch.org/belovedcommunity](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/belovedcommunity).
- <sup>3</sup> Book of Common Prayer (1979), p. 305.
- <sup>4</sup> Episcopal Evangelism Team and Task Force on Leveraging Social Media for Evangelism, "An Introduction to the Practical Theology of Evangelism," available at [www.episcopalchurch.org/evangelism-toolkit/foundations](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/evangelism-toolkit/foundations)
- <sup>5</sup> Desmond Tutu, Nobel Laureate Acceptance Speech, December 1984.
- <sup>6</sup> Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging Performance: Theater as Call and Response*.
- <sup>7</sup> Roadside Theater, "About: Story Circles." <https://roadside.org/asset/about-story-circles>.
- <sup>8</sup> Adapted from "One-to-Ones" resource created by Missional Vitality Team in the Diocese of Long Island
- <sup>9</sup> Della Pollock, "Telling the Told: Performing Like a Family," *Oral History Review* 18/2 (Fall 1990).
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Title borrowed and list adapted from Jackson Center for Saving and Making History's Basic Operating Principles
- <sup>13</sup> Adapted from the Alcoholics Anonymous Responsibility Declaration
- <sup>14</sup> William Stringfellow, *My People is the Enemy*.
- <sup>15</sup> bell hooks, *all about love; new visions*.
- <sup>16</sup> Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam," April 4, 1967.
- <sup>17</sup> Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*.
- <sup>18</sup> The Ghana Children's Charitable Foundation
- <sup>19</sup> Roadside Theater, "Who Are You?." You and Your Community's Story; A guide to concepts and events frequently used in Roadside Theater's community cultrual residencies <http://roadside.org>.
- <sup>20</sup> John Quinn, *Walking on the Pastures of Wonder: John O'Donohue in Conversation with John Quinn*





# The Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook

The Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook contains resources designed to provide a variety of ways for any faith community to adopt a StorySharing practice that is authentic to their context.

Download or print your copy – and learn about the Guidebook and Campaign – at [www.episcopalchurch.org/StorySharing](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/StorySharing).

The Beloved Community StorySharing Campaign seeks to help faith communities and individuals to share and receive stories of faith, race, and difference and to become more effective healers, reconcilers, and ambassadors of Christ in the world. Episcopal churches everywhere are encouraged to explore and practice StorySharing

Within the congregation,

Between different Episcopal congregations near and far, and

With friends, family, neighbors, faith communities, and civic partners.

As we share our stories, we practice becoming Beloved Community.

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