

*embracing*  
EVANGELISM

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THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

 VIRGINIA THEOLOGICAL  
SEMINARY

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# Embracing Evangelism

## Participant Guide

Welcome to *Embracing Evangelism*, a video series on Episcopal Evangelism from The Episcopal Church and Virginia Theological Seminary. Throughout this adventure, we will explore evangelism as a spiritual practice rooted in joy, gratitude, and holy curiosity; a practice through which we seek and speak of Jesus' loving presence and invite other people to celebrate God's life and love for them.

For each of the six sessions, this Participant Guide will provide you with Highlights to Remember, Exploratory Exercises, Discussion & Reflection Questions, Try It Out home exercises, and space for Notes. The facilitator will guide you through the full flow of each session, which generally will include doing the following:

- Welcome the group and open with prayer.
- Introduce the session theme.
- Begin the video.
- Watch through explanation of the Exploratory Exercise.
- Pause the video and lead the class in the Exploratory Exercise and post-exercise discussion.
- Resume the video.
- Pause the video for the Discussion & Reflection Questions.
- Engage the Discussion & Reflection Questions as a group.
- Finish the video.
- Close with a prayer led by you or a volunteer.

## SESSION I

### INTRODUCTION TO EMBRACING EVANGELISM

In this first session, we introduce the practice of evangelism and explore the importance of growing your own loving relationship with God.

#### Highlights to Remember

Scripture gives us ample guidance for practicing evangelism: In John 4, we read Jesus' intense conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, a conversation that leaves both of them changed. In Acts 11, Philip chases down the Ethiopian eunuch and helps the eunuch to understand where God was already speaking in his life. In Luke 19, we meet Zacchaeus, a tax collector who climbs into a tree to spy on Jesus and, by the end, hosts Jesus in his home and welcomes others to follow Jesus.

We draw on these and other scriptures in Episcopal Evangelism – the spiritual practice through which we seek, name, and celebrate Jesus' loving presence in the stories of all people and then invite everyone to MORE.

Here is a breakdown of each part of this practical definition of *Episcopal Evangelism*:

1. *Seek* – Episcopal Evangelism is inherently curious, wondering where Jesus' loving presence is showing up in others' lives and in our own.
2. *Name* – Once we find that loving presence, we name it. “Hey, when I see you do this..., it looks like God to me.” “I feel the Spirit at work when...” In other words, proclamation is essential.
3. *Celebrate* – When you discover good news, you can't keep it to yourself. You celebrate it. Let the gratitude and wonder flow, and share it with others.
4. *Jesus' loving presence* – Christian life starts with Jesus and his love. Through him, God meets us, heals us, surprises us. Through him, we have intimate knowledge of the fullness of God. Through him, God invites us into the eternal dance of the Trinity.
5. *Everyone's stories* – Stories are the heart of evangelism. There is the story of the God we meet in scripture. There are our own stories of life with God: our struggle, loneliness, authentic presence, resurrection. And there are other people's stories. Maybe they wouldn't name God, but you see God in them and can help them to find their own words and relationship.
6. *Invite everyone to MORE* – Evangelism includes an invitation: to more conversation over coffee; to a book, poem, or film that resonates with whatever you've both discovered together about God; to visit a community that is growing in faith and practice. “Come to church with me” is an option, so don't be afraid to say it! But that's just one of many ways to invite someone to MORE.

For a lot of us, this is a different kind of evangelism, but it might just be what our neighbors and even we are most hungry for.

#### Exploratory Exercise: Recognizing God in Your Midst

As was mentioned in the video, Episcopal Evangelism flows directly from our gratitude, joy, and wonder for all God's goodness. Reflect for a moment: Has there been a moment in your life when you experienced wonder, joy, or deep gratitude? What was happening? How was God part of this for you?

## One-to-One StorySharing

Now, share this story with one other person in One-to-One StorySharing.

1. Turn and find one partner. Make pairs, so everyone gets the chance to listen and to share.
2. Sit or stand so that you and your partner are looking at each other face to face.
3. One person will be Partner A and one will be Partner B.
4. Partner A will go first and will have one minute to share. When one minute has passed, you will hear a signal. This is the time to switch, so Partner B will share.
5. When it is your turn to speak, offer your authentic story, using details and emotions.
6. When it is your turn to listen, create the space to welcome the story of the other as a real blessing.
7. When you both have taken a turn, thank each other for the gift of sharing.

## Brief Discussion

- How did it feel to share your story?
- How did it feel to receive your partner's story?

## Discussion & Reflection Questions

You may not have time to discuss each question in depth as a group, so consider taking time to reflect on these questions for yourself.

How do you feel about your relationship with God?

Are you able to see and feel the love of God in your life?

What part of the definition of *Episcopal Evangelism* resonates for you?

Does any part of the definition bring you hope?

Who has been Good News to you? How was that person Good News to you?

## Try It Out

Before the next session...

Ponder the questions above, on your own through journaling or in conversation with a partner from the class.

**Notes**

## SESSION 2

### SEEK, NAME, CELEBRATE

In this session, we explore the importance of Seek, Name, and Celebrate for the practice of evangelism.

#### Highlights to Remember

As Episcopalians, we promise in our Baptismal Covenant “to seek and serve Christ in all persons.” That is a bold statement of faith! We say that we will actively listen for God’s presence in others – and we dare to believe God is moving in every person.

One of the keywords we need to remember as we explore evangelism is *Incarnation*. This term, from the Latin *carnis* (“flesh”) literally means “enfleshment.” It is based on John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” So, Incarnation is the doctrine that Jesus was fully human and fully divine, the Son of God “in the flesh.”

If we look at the world through the lens of Incarnation, we can see how God is still showing up “in the flesh” everywhere. The world is shot through with holiness and the lively presence of God. We get to see the Holy Spirit moving and going before us into all places, already at work. We can see where the light of God is already present, especially in the people around us, since we are all made in God’s image.

It is in conversation that we listen for and speak of God’s good news. In conversation, we show who WE are and receive who OTHERS are. We hear and speak truth with one another and get a glimpse of how God is stirring in our lives.

*Seeking* is a humble practice that requires deep listening and watching – a holy curiosity. We ask, “How is God present and at work in this person’s life, this person’s story?”

*Naming* is when we put into words what we see of God moving in others’ lives and in our own lives. Words do matter! Offered in humility, they can be a gift when we name how we see God in what brings joy, gives hope, and delivers freedom – in others’ lives and in our own.

*Celebrating* Jesus’ loving presence is deep, authentic, and soulful. To *celebrate* means to honor, to mark, and to hold up something worth noticing – to bless and give praise. When we seek and find Christ, we find ourselves encouraged, grateful, and delighted, like the widow who finds her lost coin and goes out saying, “Rejoice with me!” (Luke 15:8-10).

#### Exploratory Exercise: Welcome to the Feast

Settle in a comfortable seat and recall a truly memorable meal. When instructed to by the facilitator, pair with another participant and share the story of this meal using One-to-One StorySharing (described on p. \_\_\_\_).

#### Brief Discussion

- How did it feel for you to recall and share your story?
- How did it feel to receive someone else’s story?
- How did this exercise engage you in *seeking*?
- How did it engage you in *naming*?
- How did it engage you in *celebrating*?

## Discussion & Reflection Questions

You may not have time to discuss each question in depth, so consider taking time to reflect on these questions yourself.

Where do you see God at work in your life?

Where would you like to develop better “seeking” and “treasure-hunting” skills (in your neighborhood, in your relationships, at work, etc.)?

What keeps you from talking about and naming your faith and relationship with God?

When have you celebrated a “God moment” with others? How did that celebration grow your own faith?

Can you recall a moment when you really saw God alive around you? Write about it.

## Try It Out

Before the next session...

Actively notice God’s loving and lively presence around you.

Keep a list of those “sightings” on your cell phone, or journal about them.

Write about any of the times you saw God really alive in your life, past or present.

## Notes



## SESSION 3

### THE GREAT STORY AND YOUR STORY

#### Highlights to Remember

Stories are the heart of evangelism, and everybody has one. You don't need a degree or a collar to share your story; you just need to notice the moments when you've experienced God's loving presence in your life and then to use your words – aloud – to share those stories.

Stories are also the heart of faith. Our faith wouldn't exist without stories. There's the story of God, which we discover when we look more deeply at our own lives and the lives of other people, and especially as we dive into scripture. That's where we find the Great Story.

The Old Testament is basically the long, complicated, beautiful, and sometimes disturbing saga of the Hebrew people's stories with God. That Great Story continues into the New Testament, when Jesus starts a new chapter in the story of God's life with us by coming to be among us in the flesh.

It's easy to see just how critical stories were to Jesus' ministry. He used them to teach profound and eternal truths, and he invited people to find a new life – and a new story – by following him.

Each of us knows and treasures parts of this Great Story as our own. Whether through parts of scripture, hymns, liturgy, or the lives of saints and faithful people, each of us has a special way we enter into the Great Story of God and God's people. That's the story we want to invite others into.

#### Exploratory Exercise: Cardboard Testimonials

For this exercise, each participant will need either a piece of blank cardstock and a marker to write in large, clear letters to share one's own testimony.

During a time of quiet meditation:

- Take a minute to reflect on moment of hardship, struggle, pain, or loss in your life (one that you would willing to share with others).
- Where has God brought you, or at least, where do you see God in the struggle now?

Name the transformation. On one side of the paper, capture the fear, pain, or heartache in a sentence or two. On the other side, capture the healing and resurrection, even if it has only begun. When finished, stand as you are able and walk around silently, pausing to individually show other participants both sides of your paper and to view theirs. Don't tell the story; just acknowledge silently – with a smile, a tear, a hug, a high-five – your shared gratitude at what God has done and is doing.

#### One-to-One StorySharing

After sharing silently for a minute or two, stop where you are and break into pairs for One-to-One StorySharing. After one partner shares, listen for the signal. At that point, the listener has the opportunity to reflect where he or she saw or heard God in the story. Then, switch roles.

#### Brief Discussion

- How does it feel to share and receive these testimonies?
- What did you learn about your own story?
- What did you learn about how God works and what God's presence looks like?

## Discussion & Reflection Questions

You may not have time to discuss each question in depth, so consider taking time to reflect on these questions yourself.

Think back to when you heard the Great Story of God alive in the world – in scripture, worship, song, conversation, or stories of the lives of followers of Jesus through the ages and today.

Which parts of the story do you treasure? Why?

How would you capture the Great Story of God in relationship to the world?

What's the Good News of God's loving presence?

Think of your own story of faith.

At which moments did you sense God stirring? When did God move or change you?

Who are your faith ancestors and mentors – the people whose faith and lives you admire?

What were their lives like? What was the role of faith in their stories?

## Try It Out

Before the next session...

Consider the moments when you felt God show up in your life.

Share the story of one of these moments with someone you know.

If one of your faith ancestors or mentors is living, tell that person what his or her story and faith mean to you.

## Notes

## SESSION 4

### THE STORIES OF OTHERS

In this fourth session, we will explore The Stories of Others: why they matter and how to truly receive them and be blessed by them. First, let us open with prayer.

#### Highlights to Remember

At the heart of our Christian faith is the Great Story, the collection of stories of God's creating, redeeming work in scripture, especially in the story of Jesus. We are all part of this Great Story – all made in God's image, all moving through a world shot through with God. We still need to grow our capacity to seek, name, and celebrate God at work in our own lives.

One-to-One StorySharing is a simple way to open the door to this practice. A One-to-One is an intentional conversation between two people who share and receive each other's stories of what matters most.

You may wonder why we call it *StorySharing* and not *storytelling*? *Storytelling* is used to persuade, to convince, to shape understanding. It is generally one-way and thus can be transactional. *StorySharing* is relational. It is about engaging and creating connections. In the course of StorySharing, we help to form the Beloved Community: a just and compassionate community where we are deeply invested in each other's flourishing.

StorySharing is also not interviewing or pastoral care. In StorySharing, both people share their stories and both discover the blessing of creating a space to receive others' stories. The key word here is *mutuality*. If the sharing is one way – I ask questions and you answer, or you as the expert or caregiver and I am the one with a particular need – then we haven't really formed the basis for life-giving mutual relationship.

In StorySharing, both our stories matter. We both experience the vulnerability of offering a story and the blessing of receiving one.

#### Exploratory Exercise: One-to-One StorySharing

Lessons from The Episcopal Church's *Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook*:

Some of the time, you'll be the one offering your story. Here's what you should keep in mind when sharing:

- Keep it real, sharing real stories from real life.
- Make it vivid and full of all the senses: what you saw, smelled, and tasted; who was there; where you were; what you felt. In other words, re-create the experience.
- Avoid interpreting or reflecting on the experience.
- Notice the beginning, middle, and end of your story, plus points where you made a significant turn or choice.

Sometimes, you'll be the one listening. Here are some points to keep in mind when listening:

- Make sure you're an active, engaged listener.
- Imagine the speaker is revealing something holy.
- Offer generous hospitality. What gestures or quality of presence help you to feel valued? Give that to your partner.

- If there is a pause, ask open questions to help your partner speak freely and fully to go deeper with their story.
  - “How did that make you feel?” or “What was that like for you?”
  - “I’d like to picture this. What did you see?”
  - “Please, tell me more.”
- Ask for follow-up opportunities:
  - “Is there anyone you think would share this passion or concern?”
  - “Would you like to join me for/read this together/check out this podcast/meet this group...?”

#### StorySharing Prompts for This Session:

- When have you felt connected to a community, humanity, the universe, or something greater than yourself? What was happening?
- Tell me about a time that you felt God really alive (in our church [if appropriate]).
- Tell me about a time that you shared your gifts. What did you do? What made that possible?

#### Brief Discussion

- How did it feel to share your story?
- How did it feel to listen to the story of another person?
- Where would StorySharing be helpful in your church’s life?
- How could you introduce it?
- Where would StorySharing be helpful in your practice of Episcopal Evangelism?

#### Discussion & Reflection Questions

You may not have time to discuss each question in depth, so consider taking time to reflect on these questions yourself.

What is one way you could imagine StorySharing as part of your church’s life?

What is one way you could weave StorySharing into your personal life and practice of evangelism?

#### Try It Out

Before the next session...

Invite a fellow church member, a friend, or a family member to help you out. Explain that you’re practicing something called StorySharing. Communicate that you’re genuinely curious about that person’s own experiences and that you would like to share your experiences as well. Then, offer the time and attention to listen and share.

### Examples:

- Peace of heart and mind comes from a power greater than ourselves. Share about a time when you have felt the peace of Christ. Ask another what helps that person to find peace of heart and mind.
- No person ever amounts to much until he or she learns to appreciate his or her origins. Share a story about the first person that took you to church or significantly informed your faith. Ask another about his or her faith origins.
- Share a story about a time someone made you feel loved. How did that impact you? Ask for another to share his or her own story of feeling loved.

### Notes

## SESSION 5

### INVITE EVERYONE TO MORE

In this fifth session, we will explore Invite Everyone to MORE: how to be truly curious and open to the Spirit, and how to invite people to discover more with God. First, let us open with prayer.

#### Highlights to Remember

1. **Pay attention.** Look and listen for the Holy Spirit's prompting, and look and listen for moments when it might seem as if someone wants to be invited. Then you can share an authentic, generous invitation appropriate to the moment. It should be based NOT on a formula or predetermined "good" outcome, but rather on whatever God is up to in that moment and on your genuine desire to celebrate that moment.
2. **Be authentic.** Stay rooted in what makes your relationship with God in Christ unique. Stay tethered to that hope and joy, and share your invitation from that place. Remember that you're showing up with openness to whatever God wants to do in this person's life through you and your story.
3. **Be present.** Inviting does not have to be imposing. It's a ministry of presence. When we are in tune with others, we can offer a generous, non-imposing invitation. If someone says, "I lost my job and am so confused about where my life is going," don't respond with a generic invitation to church. Instead, share a story of how your faith has provided direction in your life. Share a scripture passage that helped you through a rough time or a book that God used to encourage you, or simply invite the person to walk or pray with you. Whatever being the loving presence of God with this person looks like, do that. Then wait for the Holy Spirit to open the door to MORE.
4. **Use your words.** If you're being authentic and present – to God and to the person you are with – the words will come in time. In our Baptismal Covenant, we do not promise to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through perfect words and deeds. Instead, we make these promises as we are – awkward and a bit flawed – with God's help. In Luke 12:11-12, Jesus promises his followers: "Do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say." Evangelism is about simultaneously showing up and getting out of God's way.
5. **Know your motivation.** There's a good chance that many people you know and encounter are lonely. Only about half of Americans have daily meaningful in-person social interactions. In England, there is a cabinet-level position – a Minister of Loneliness – to combat an "epidemic of loneliness." When we invite people to MORE with God, then share our stories and invite theirs, and then celebrate God's loving presence in both, we help to remove the deep aloneness many of us experience. In Genesis 2:18, God says that it's not good for humans to be alone. Jesus lived, ministered, died, and rose again within the context of community. The truth is, human beings thrive when we are heard, wanted, and loved. Who doesn't want a life with more love, more connection, more liberation, more hope, more meaning? That life is possible with Jesus. Sharing about it might be the most powerful motivation for evangelism.

6. **Be brave.** Chances are you will experience rejection if you make an invitation. Some people don't want to connect with the Spirit or with faith. Or perhaps you will not be the one to unlock the door and draw them out. You can't force it, get attached to a particular outcome, or take the response personally. Create a hospitable space where people feel valued, heard, and held. Offer people the opportunity to taste and see for themselves the goodness of God. The rest is up to them and to God.

### **Exploratory Exercise: Invitation Matters**

Use StorySharing in a circle to share a story about an invitation that made a difference in your life. Remember these helpful guidelines:

1. Listen deeply. Listen again. Then listen again.
2. Assume response-ability for yourself.
3. Speak only when it is your turn.
4. Give each person equal time.
5. Be a participant, not just an observer.
6. Get out of the information mindset and listen for feeling and experience.
7. Resist the temptation to use Prayer Book speak.
8. Never argue or debate another person's story.

Recall a moment when you received an invitation that made a difference in your life. Reflect:

- What was the invitation?
- What was happening in your life during that season?
- Why did the invitation matter?
- Who made the invitation?
- What lasting effect has that invitation had on your life?

Share your answers to these questions in the circle.

### **Brief Discussion**

- Why did that invitation work for you? Maybe the invitation came in one of these ways:
- What would NOT have worked?

### **Discussion & Reflection Questions**

You may not have time to discuss each question in depth, so consider taking time to reflect on these questions yourself.

Now that you have had a chance to reflect on an invitation that mattered, what would you say to the person who shared it with you?

How did this exercise and conversation shift the way you view and approach invitation?

## Try It Out

Before the next session...

You know the difference an invitation has made for you. When you've got time on your own, create an index card invitation, naming the invitation you most hope to offer and the person with whom you want to share it.

Reflect on the following and then, when you're ready, write it on your card: With whom have you had a poignant spiritual conversation? What is the *more* to which you feel God calling you to invite this person?

Share what you wrote on your card: Speak your hoped-for invitation to a partner in the group, or if you're alone, offer it to God. Take the card around with you. Pray for the invitation and for God's blessing on you both.

## Notes



## SESSION 6

### GO! DISCERNMENT AND WHAT'S NEXT

In this sixth and final session, we work on Go! Discernment and What's Next and practice ways of going into the world to bless and be blessed by others.

#### Highlights to Remember

Jesus was always inviting people to come follow him and to go. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15).

He knew it was a risk and that it wouldn't make people popular or successful. He knew it might feel awkward and uncomfortable, but he knew it was worth it. Jesus invited them into an ever-deepening relationship with God. And then he invited them to carry that love into the world, so people everywhere could fall in love with God and follow his way of love, forgiveness, hope, and healing.

Lots of Episcopal churches are comfortable with service and compassion for others. However, sharing our faith, being vulnerable, and going public about faith are harder and riskier. Thankfully, the followers of Jesus can take risks together.

Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple once said, "The Church is the only society that does not exist for its members." Jesus never intended God's love stop at the doors of a beautiful temple or upper room. He was out, among people, and he brought disciples with him to share in words and deeds the life-changing love of God. He's still pulling us out, beyond what we know and who we know.

#### Exploratory Exercise: Who Is My Neighbor?

Draw four concentric circles on a piece of paper. Then, explore the circles.

- **Innermost Circle:** Get to know JERUSALEM (your closest neighbors, family, friends). Whom has God placed around you? Especially call to mind people in your closer circle who are not part of a faith community but seem to yearn for MORE.
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Acquaintances
  - Work/School colleagues
  - Volunteer groups
  - Social groups
  - Civic affiliations
  - Hobbies/Special interests

- **Second Circle:** Get to know JUDEA (the neighborhood/physical community around your church or your own home).
  - Where and among what people has God placed you and your church?
  - Is it a residential area? Commercial? Mixed?
  - What are the civic centers or businesses around your church?
  - Are there schools or other faith centers?
  - What is God up to in the neighborhood?
  - Who lives or regularly inhabits the area near or surrounding the church and your own home?
  
- **Third Circle:** Get to know SAMARIA (the margins of your community: groups, cultures, and generations with whom you do not have relationship, or from whom you or your church have been alienated).
  - Where are the social, racial, or economic rifts or divides in your community?
  - What groups are most separated or alienated from your church?
  - Through what unlikely groups might God speak, teach, or bless you with their gifts?
  - Who on your margins is waiting to hear good news? What might that good news be?
  - How could you find out what “good news” sounds like to them?
  - Whom are you connected with, and whom can you connect with, in your SAMARIA?
  
- *(Optional)* **Outermost Circle:** Explore the ENDS OF THE EARTH (the many places and groups that are truly outside your own experience and familiarity – far physically or far because of experiences and attitudes).
  - How could you open yourself to even see these new groups?
  - How could you learn and share with them?
  - What challenges might you face if you seek to connect with and get to know one another?  
*Note:* You might not have a solid picture of who is in this outer circle. The point here may be exploring your willingness to go with Jesus beyond your imagining.

As you notice who and what is in each of these concentric circles, ask:

- What is God up to in their midst?
- How can you build relationship with the people and communities you are discovering?
- What are their needs and longings? How can you bless and love them?
- What are your needs and longings? How could they bless you?
- If Jesus met this person or group, what would he do?

## Discussion & Reflection Questions

You may not have time to discuss each question in depth, so consider taking time to reflect on these questions on your own.

Look back at your concentric circles. Who is in your circles?

Is there a particular group or community you are most yearning to connect with? How can you bless and love them? How could they bless you?

If Jesus met this person or group, what would he do? How could you follow his footsteps?

## Close with Prayer

*Participants gather in a circle.*

Around the circle, offer prayers to God:

- Round 1: thank God for one important experience in this time of learning and practicing together.
- Round 2: name one step you commit to take – a person you will talk to, a place you will go, a story of God's goodness you will share, etc.
- Round 3: ask for God's help in whatever way you need for this next step as you prepare to Go.

Conclude with the Lord's Prayer, as below or in the words and language of your heart:

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

## Notes