

StorySharing and Creation Care

We know that the shortest distance between two people is a story. Stories move us and connect us like no argument or facts every could. And you don't need special expertise to share your story. You just need to notice the moments when you've experienced God's presence in your life and in the world. Notice what experiences have inspired you to love or grieve, or driven you to act. Then use your words – out loud – to share those stories and welcome others to do the same. Learn more about sharing stories at www.episcopalchurch.org/storysharing or about Creation Care at www.episcopalchurch.org/creation.

Creation Care StorySharing Prompts

We begin with questions and statements (“prompts”) that could draw forth stories about creation and faith.

- When have you experienced wonder, love or awe at God's creation? Share that story in vivid detail.
- Share a story about a moment when you felt deeply connected with God in nature. How did you recognize God in that moment?
- The Book of Job says animals, birds, plants, and fish teach us about God. Recall a moment when an interaction with creation taught you about God.
- As you think back on your connection to the natural world, have you seen any of the places or creatures you love be damaged or limited because of human action? Share about that experience, including how you discovered the change and how you felt about that loss.
- Have you ever been part of protecting or preserving God's creation? What was that experience?
- Share a story about when you felt really connected to your community, the world, the universe, or something greater than yourself, as a result of engaging with creation care or eco-justice work?
- Many of us hold particular convictions or concerns close to our hearts. What is one belief, conviction or concern that is important to you? When did this begin to matter so much to you?
- Share a story about a time when you felt especially powerful (or powerless) in facing an issue of creation care, eco-justice or environmental racism.

What Is StorySharing?

StorySharing is a two-fold practice: you experience the vulnerability of offering your own story *and* the blessing of receiving the stories of others. It can happen in-person, online, on the phone, in correspondence – wherever and however people communicate. You may share your story in one place (use a cell phone to video your own story and post it on Facebook) and receive other's stories elsewhere (comment on someone's video and honor their sharing). The spirit of vulnerability, curiosity and mutuality is what matters most.

What's So Great About a Story?

- It is natural. Whether you're in love, inspired or excited, you want to talk about it.
- It is simple. Share about a moment, not your whole life story.
- It is a blessing. God blesses, teaches and encourages us through the stories we share.
- It is irrefutable. We rarely get into arguments about an experience.

What's the Difference between StorySharing and 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 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 eventually share their stories, and both discover the blessing of creating a space to receive others' stories. The key word is *mutuality*. Offering and receiving stories in this way is one of the most precious and holy gifts one human being could share with another.

How to Offer and Receive Stories

From The Episcopal Church's Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook: www.episcopalchurch.org/storysharing

If you are offering your story, keep this in mind:

1. **Keep it real**, sharing real stories. Pause and listen to your own life. What's happening? What is God doing around you?
2. **Incorporate all the senses**: what you saw, smelled, tasted, felt, heard, who was there, where you were, what you felt. In other words, re-create the experience.
3. **Avoid interpreting and reflecting from a distance**. Stay in the moment. Notice the beginning, middle, and end of your story, plus points where you made a significant turn or choice.
4. **Tell your story in your words**. Don't try to sound like anyone else or insert certain vocabulary.
5. **Focus on God and your experience of God**. If it's an experience at church, talk about where and how you encountered God, not just what's good about your church. If it's an experience in nature or some other holy place, share not just what you saw but how you knew God was there. Scripture tells us the signs of God's presence: abundance, healing, unconditional love, resurrection, perseverance, generosity, wisdom, community. What signs do you see in this experience?
6. **Value your story**. 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.

If you are listening or otherwise receiving a story, keep this in mind:

1. **Be an active, engaged listener**.
2. **Listen for the holy**. Imagine the speaker is revealing something holy and life-changing.
3. **Offer generous hospitality**. What gestures or quality of presence help you to feel valued? Give that to your partner.
4. **Ask open questions**. If there is a pause, ask questions that help your partner to speak freely and fully and 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."
5. **Ask for follow-up opportunities**:
 - "Is there anyone you think would share this passion or concern?"
 - "Would you like to join me for ... (or to read this together, or to check out this podcast, or to meet this group)?"
6. **Share the love**. Listening to someone's story demonstrates your love and respect for them.

If you are sharing stories in a group, also keep this in mind:

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. Never argue or debate another person's story.

Leading a StorySharing Session for a Group

Many of us avoid sharing about matters close to our hearts, whether faith, politics or other personal life. Through StorySharing, you offer your own story *and* receive the stories of others. This basic yet powerful StorySharing exercise for groups helps to develop a basic comfort with sharing and receiving stories, specifically about Creation Care, Eco-Justice and Environmental Racism. Use the prompts on the first page of this handout.

Time Frame: 5-15 minutes

Target Audience: Church members – young and old – and ministry partners

Set-up: Appropriate for any group gathering: worship, fellowship, classes, meetings & more

Use the following process for guiding a group through StorySharing:

1. Inform the group that they 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 specific 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 next page). Give people at least 1 minute to ponder their story and get in touch with multi-sensory details, 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.