

Introduction to the Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook



EVANGELISM
INITIATIVES



RACIAL
RECONCILIATION

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society

This booklet introduces the Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook, a resource that provides a variety of ways for any faith community to adopt an authentic StorySharing practice.

The Guidebook seeks to help faith communities and individuals to share and receive stories of faith, race, and difference in the context of Christian life and in your interactions with the wider world.

Download or print at www.episcopalchurch.org/storysharing
Available in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole.

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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

Welcome

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 the stories we told, but I remember the rules. We would each take a turn to share a story. After each person finished, they’d sit down and the group responded, “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, wild and ubiquitous. With those early experiences, the love 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.

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. 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.

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. 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 you will share your story.

Our stories speak of God.

Faithfully,
H. Mallette Stephens
February 2018



Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook and Campaign

Storytelling is used to persuade and shape understanding. It is generally one-way and perhaps even transactional. StorySharing is *relational*. It is telling your story and receiving the stories of others. It is about engagement and connection.

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

As we develop our skills and capacity for StorySharing, we will become more effective **healers, reconcilers, and ambassadors of Christ** in the world.

The StorySharing Guidebook contains resources gathered and designed to provide a variety of ways for faith communities to adopt an authentic StorySharing practice. It includes reflections on what StorySharing is, why a congregation would do it, and how it relates to reconciliation and evangelism.

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."

- James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*

Intended for the church leader (clergy or lay), it provides the scaffolding to understand the process, discern how to introduce it in the church setting, to build a community of support and practice and, ultimately, to integrate StorySharing into your Church's way of life. It also allows for creativity and innovation on the part of the leader.

Contents of the StorySharing Guidebook

The Guidebook includes several elements designed to support church leaders in adopting a StorySharing practice. These resources include ...

Basic Principles for Cultivating an Environment of Respect and Justice, like listening to be transformed; assuming “response-ability,” and translating insider-church language to personal and accessible words.

Facilitators’ Guidelines, including explaining techniques to the group; managing cross-talk; and knowing when to intervene

StorySharing Prompts to spark stories on faith in a church-related setting, faith in a secular setting, race and identity, and difference

Suggested Prayers for the Experience

Designs for the Experience

Detailed scripts support leaders implementing these StorySharing designs:

1. Exploratory Design: **Simple StorySharing**
Introduce StorySharing about faith, race, difference and more.
Gain comfort sharing and receiving stories in and beyond the church.
2. Exploratory Design: **Our Story in Pictures**
Use parish photos as prompts to name and identify the StorySharing practices present in a group, and to invite them to more.
3. **Formation Series** Design
Explore different StorySharing methods in 4 to 6 sessions.
Engage evangelism and reconciliation as a community.
4. **Mini-Retreat** Design
Host a three- to five-hour gathering that includes an in-depth experience of StorySharing and Spiritual Autobiography.
5. **Way of Life** Design
Integrate StorySharing methods into every aspect of congregational life: committee meetings, formation events, outreach activities, etc.

StorySharing Techniques

The Guidebook introduces participants to three StorySharing techniques:

1. Roadside Theatre's Story Circles

Familiar to anyone who has ever sat around with family and/or friends, remembering significant events, recounting histories, and singing songs. Great way for small groups to get to know each other, to share deeply about their encounters with the Holy, with race and with difference.

2. One-to-One StorySharing

Similar to practices from community organizing and public narrative. An intentional, well-framed conversation between two or more people who share stories, explore differences, and discover common purpose.

3. Listening Out Loud

A specific and facilitated way to hear a story and share what was heard. Recommended for groups with some StorySharing experience, participants listen to a story and retell the story in the first person. Activate empathy and compassion, without erasing or collapsing difference.

Church-wide Support for StorySharing

1. **Download the full Guidebook** and this Introduction in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole at www.episcopalchurch.org/storysharing.
2. From April to September 2018, Project Leader Hershey Mallette Stephens and a team of StoryWeavers – six multilingual young leaders in the U.S. and Latin America – will **lead trainings** and gather stories in dioceses and conferences. **Contact the team:** storysharing@episcopalchurch.org.
3. **Ministries can connect and share** across regions, ideologies, cultures, and other dividing lines. Beginning in July 2018, the Episcopal Asset Map will assist churches everywhere in pairing up for conversations. Search “StorySharing” this summer at www.episcopalassetmap.org to find a partner near or far from you.
4. **Record your stories** digitally or in writing and share them at storysharing@episcopalchurch.org. With permission, stories may be shared on The Episcopal Church's web and social media platforms. Submitted stories will be preserved by The Episcopal Church Archives.

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Download or print your copy—and learn about the Campaign—at www.episcopalchurch.org/storysharing
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The Beloved Community Story Sharing 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 Story Sharing 1) within the congregation, 2) between different Episcopal congregations near and far, and 3) with friends, family, neighbors, faith communities, and civic partners.

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

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