



A STORY TO TELL: Interpreting God's Mission to Givers StewardShop 110

Description

In this 55-minute workshop, participants examine the basic questions for interpreting God's mission, "What story will you tell?" and "How will you tell it?" During the workshop participants gain skill in choosing the best methods for sharing their personal connection with the stories of God's mission through the Church.

Audience

"A Story to Tell" assists pastors and other stewardship leaders who want to improve their skill in interpreting the stories of the church at work. The workshop especially benefits "mission interpreters," volunteer stewardship leaders trained for service in ELCA synods.

Skills

Participants in this workshop learn how to choose specific ELCA mission stories for specific audiences and how to connect those stories with the personal faith stories they and their audiences want to share.

Materials

Handout, "A Story to Tell," one per participant

Handout, "Finding Yourself in the Story," one per participant

Multiple copies of *Making Christ Known* (current issue)

Optional:

Multiple copies of churchwide or other interpretive materials, such as:

- *Making Christ Known Supplement* (current issue)
- *The Lutheran Magazine* (current issue)
- Synod supplements to *The Lutheran* (current issue)
- *Stewardship Resource Guide* (current issue)
- *Statement of Intent* (current copy)
- *Voices of Congregational Life* (current issue)
- *Stewardship NOW Newsletter* (current issue)
- *Where Does My Offering Go?*

Optional:

Single copies of these churchwide interpretation resources:

- *ELCA Yearbook* (current edition)
- *MOSAIC Video Magazine* (current or back editions)
- Other interpretation videos or slide sets from various divisions, commissions or departments of the ELCA (consult ELCA web site).

Schedule

As Participants Arrive

Presentation, "Just the Right Story" (15 minutes)

Mining the Resource (5 minutes)

Connecting to Your Story (10 minutes)

Telling the Story (15 minutes)

Wrap-up (10 minutes)

WORKSHOP DESIGN

As Participants Arrive

Make available multiple copies of as many mission interpretation resources as possible, including those from local/regional agencies or programs. Encourage participants to take single copies of several of these resources, and to read them while they are waiting for the workshop to begin.

Presentation, "Just the Right Story" (15 minutes)

Distribute the handout, "A Story to Tell," inviting participants to scan it quickly as you prepare for a presentation about mission interpretation. Begin by reviewing why "telling the church's story" is so important:

- Stories knit people together in common human experience.
- Stories provide hearers with deeper imagination and emotion about facts and ideas.
- Stories provide people with a sense of the whole church.
- Stories focus attention on the observable effects of God's Spirit.

Characterize the material in the handout, encouraging participants to add comments from their own experience. (This models the kinds of presentations you hope they will make.) Somewhere in this presentation, characterize the importance of story-hearers connecting with what they are hearing, on an experiential and emotional level. When the story "out there" intertwines with the story "in here," listeners suddenly realize the importance of what they are hearing.

Mining the Resource

(5 minutes)

Distribute copies of the current issue of *Making Christ Known*. Divide the group into small groups of two or three persons each. Participants should sift through this interpretive resource, looking for one or two stories that might be especially valuable for their congregations. They will use these items in this and the following activity.

As they “mine the resource,” participants might use questions such as these to guide their choices:

- Which stories might inspire members of your congregation?
- Which stories might carry your members beyond their own narrow understanding of the church’s mission?
- Which stories especially match your congregation’s vision or mission?
- Which stories can be easily understood?
- Which stories might show the depth of ministry the ELCA engages in?

Local or regional option

If it seems appropriate, you can substitute other interpretive resources for *Making Christ Known*. In this way you can adapt the workshop to a specific congregation – e.g., using its newsletter – or locale. See the optional resources list at the beginning of this design for examples.

Connecting to Your Story

(10 minutes)

Distribute pencils and pens, and the second handout, “Finding Yourself in the Story,” directing participants to its questions. Participants complete this worksheet, using as an example one of the stories they have chosen. The notes they take are for their own use later in the workshop. (Remind participants to use a separate sheet of paper or write on the reverse side if they will use this handout as a reproducible original in their own congregation.) Circulate among groups as they work, answering questions. Tell participants when five minutes and two minutes remain for their work.

In case some participants have trouble with the basic question, “Where do you find yourself in this story?” use any of these additional prompts to help them connect their own life with the material in the story they have chosen.

- Think back in your life to recall similar experiences.
- When you think of other people, move beyond your family and friends, perhaps to people you have known in other places or earlier years.

- When you try to connect your life with this story, think about the core elements of the experiences – e.g., despair, hope, sudden rescue, undeserved grace – that make them similar.
- Answer the question, “How is this story like my own story?”

The intent in completing this worksheet is to provide notes for the next activity in the workshop, the actual telling of a mission story of the ELCA.

Telling the Story (15 minutes)

In this activity, participants now put into action what they have learned thus far. In groups of two or three, and using the materials they have read or completed, participants take turns telling each other about one mission story they have determined to be valuable for their congregation.

Each participant should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Tell the story to the other as though to members of their own congregation.
- The handouts, “A Story to Tell,” and “Finding Your Own Story,” indicate some of the ways to frame the story.
- A key feature of the story will be to connect the story-teller and the listeners with what is important in the mission story.
- The story-teller might also provide some background comments about why this particular story would be helpful in his/her congregation.

Each participant will have from three to five minutes, thus allowing a few moments for the other small group members to offer a few positive comments about the story and the manner in which it was told.

Circulate among groups, keeping the group members aware of how much time is elapsing so that all group members have a chance to tell their story and receive the group’s feedback. You may need to remind groups to stay on task, especially as the stories get interesting or engender other ideas.

Wrap-up (10 minutes)

After the fifteen minute story-telling period is elapsed, bring the group’s attention back to these final encouraging words:

- The simple act of conversation about God’s mission does inspire donors’ hearts and draw them together as part of Christ’s church.
- Participants will grow in their skill as they continue to engage in the activity of telling the story.

- God's Spirit will continue to help them find "the right words" and "the right methods" for sharing what excites them about God's work in this church.

End the workshop with a short prayer, and dismiss participants with your thanks.



A STORY TO TELL: Guidelines for Mission Interpretation

You have a story to tell: How the work of the Holy Spirit through the congregations and institutions and programs of this church body accomplish God's will! But there's more to the story than you might first think. This page helps you see some guidelines and principles for interpreting the church's mission.

- 1. Be positive and upbeat.** Stories of mission are far from "normal." They carry with them an invitation for listeners and readers to become excited. As you tell the stories of God's work through the ELCA, add bounce and electricity to your voice and body language to show your genuine appreciation for what you're telling.
- 2. Check your facts AND the big picture.** Accurate facts aren't the soul of the story, but are still necessary. Even more important: Understanding the larger context in which this story fits. Check your sources to be sure you have both facts and the big picture clearly in mind.
- 3. Talk about the important things that happen to people.** Invariably God's Spirit changes people in important ways. People are comforted, rescued, and filled with new hope. The work of God's people through the ELCA fills empty stomachs and minds. The stories you tell are able to draw together "what's important" and plant "we're making a difference" in people's imaginations. Be specific about "what's important."
- 4. Vary the ways you "tell."** The imagination of your audience is sparked in many different ways, which fact requires you to approach "telling" in a variety of ways. Think about how you:
 - Use descriptive words to draw audience members into the story.
 - Ask leading questions that keep the audience interested in the progression of the story.
 - If photos or other visual material is available, use them to supplement your story.
 - Use technology sparingly. Although PowerPoint, slides or videos draw people into a story, your energized personal testimony is also powerful motivation for audience reaction and action.

- Use words and phrases that evoke imagination.
- Avoid “persuasion” as your frame of mind or way of telling. Instead, think of yourself inviting people into an exciting story.

5. Keep the audience in mind. Consider the time of day, energy levels, and the ages of your audience. Look for feedback in eyes, faces and body language. Imagine what you might want to hear if you were a member of the audience. Honor their intelligence and presume that they are interested.

6. Connect your personal story to the story of the church. Somewhere in the story are answers to the question, “Where do you find yourself in this story?” As you come to the end of the story of the church, invite the audience to imagine their own connections to the story. You might think of matters such as:

- What elements of the story are similar to your own life experiences?
- Who do you know that might have participated in the story?
- How has the work of the ELCA changed your life in ways similar to those in the story?
- Who do you know whose life has been changed in a way similar to the story’s end result?
- What else do you know about the context, results, or long-term effect of this story?

7. Connect the story to an expected response. By your telling you are not only giving an account of the church’s stewardship of its members’ contributions, but asking those members for continued support. Thank audience members for their past generosity, and encourage them to continue to respond to needs and opportunities embedded in the stories you tell. Be specific if a specific response is expected – e.g., participation in an imminent gathering of funds, clothing or political expression.

8. Welcome comments and questions. Without engaging in protracted discussions with individual audience members, encourage them to ask questions and offer comments (especially their own positive experiences).



FINDING YOURSELF IN THE STORY Connecting With the Church's Stories

The stories of the ELCA at work doing God's will may at first seem far away or even unreal compared to what you experience each day. On closer examination, though, you can begin to see that almost every story about this church connects in some way with stories you already know, stories you have already experienced. Use this handout to help you discover how that might be true for you. Answer as many questions as you can.

TITLE OR SUBJECT OF THE STORY _____

1. **What elements of the story are similar to your own life experiences?** _____

2. **Who do you know that might have participated in the story?** _____

3. **How has the work of the ELCA changed your life in ways similar to those in the story?** _____

4. **Who do you know whose life has been changed in a way similar to the story's end result?** _____

5. **What else do you know about the context, results, or long-term effect of this story?** _____

6. **Where else do you find yourself in this story?** _____

