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INVITE

Living Faith in Daily Life A small group study

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, **“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”** (Romans 10:14-15)

Inviting others into the faith community and faith sharing is mark of discipleship—one of the seven highlighted in the ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship:

The experience of God's loving touch in one's life is a gift the maturing disciple feels compelled to share with others. One way our faith becomes active is when we put into words what God has done for us. Words of witness and acts of genuine hospitality directed toward our friends, relatives and neighbors create the opportunity through which the Holy Spirit brings others into a relationship with Christ and his church.

*The biblical model for evangelism is relational: friends bring friends to Jesus. “Come and see” are the operative words and find frequent expression in the Gospels, the story of the early church, and in the tradition of the church over the centuries. The disciple plants seeds and invites; the Holy Spirit works the miracle of faith and conversion. Part of a disciple's job description is to invite others often.” (Excerpt from “Faith Practices: Assessing Their Place in Your Life,” *Living Faith Congregation Guide*, 2000).*

Sharing one's faith involves conversations with friends, relatives, associates and neighbors about the presence and importance of Christ in our lives. Sharing faith means taking opportunities to “name drop” for God in communication with strangers. Sharing faith means living in such a way that our lifestyle, actions, and words reflect the One whose name we bear: “Christ-ian.”

Then why is sharing faith so difficult? Why do Lutherans cringe when they are reminded that they are called to share their faith in everyday living? Why is speaking the words of faith sharing so scary? This study guide is designed to help take the fear and the mystery out of faith sharing. It is designed to encourage you and your congregation to embrace the important role God has called us to as bearers of the Good News. Through each of the four sessions, participants will discover their unique God-given faith sharing-styles and come to appreciate their role in sharing the Gospel with other people. Through a faith-sharing assessment tool, role plays, journaling, and practice at telling their faith stories, participants will grow in their confidence as they share their faith with others in the context of daily life.

How to use this course

This course will work best in a small group of seven to 12 people. Such a group can focus on sharing experiences and insights instead of simply mastering content. One person can lead the group or you might rotate leadership among participants. Suggestions for the leader are found in small boxes throughout this resource. The leader's task in this course is to encourage discussion and action, not to teach content.

The goal for this study is to create a learning environment that is Christ-centered, biblically based, accepting and conducive to personal sharing. Each session of *Invite* is divided into three sections:

Gathering

A time to warm up through prayer and personal sharing. Questions set the stage for the theme and encourage personal sharing that builds group identity and fosters supportive relationships. Allow time for laughter and genuine community building.

Growing

A time to study the Bible, reflect through story and exercises, and journal individual and group discoveries.

Going

A time to imagine the possibilities for faith sharing between sessions, to pray and to commit to further prayer and reflection.

Depending on the length of group conversation, sessions can run between 50 and 90 minutes. Ideal settings for this study include participant's homes, church, or any comfortable room conducive to open, honest sharing.



Advance preparation

To facilitate a successful small group experience, attend to the following needs in advance of the first session:

- Order a copy of this study, *Pray: Living Faith in Daily Life*, for each participant. (800/328-4648; ISBN:6-0001-6441-6, \$1.25 each, plus shipping and handling)
- Provide a small notebook for the personal reflection and journal exercises. Remember extra pencils, pens and Bibles.
- The facilitator should review this study in advance of the group's gathering to determine which resources to have on hand for each session.
- Plan for refreshments.

Session 1

You Will Be My Witnesses

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the study begins. Encourage each person in turn to answer the following questions. You might start with your own sharing.

1. Share your name and tell about a time when you witnessed something that made a strong impression on you—an accident in your car, a person helping another person to overcome an obstacle, etc.
2. Tell about a time when you were called to be a witness or to tell the truth.

Let's Pray

Pray, or ask a volunteer to pray the following prayer aloud or speak another prayer of your choosing.

God of wisdom and truth, you have gathered us together as your people. Empower us to bear witness to the truth of your Good News. Strengthen us with the confidence that you have already given us the skills we as your disciples need to speak about you to others. Challenge us to be bold in word and deed for you. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud. You might read this material ahead of time and simply share it with the group.

"I was at my daughter's soccer game sitting near another parent. As we talked, I realized that more than anything else, this man really needed Christ in his life. It wasn't that his life was filled with lots of problems. It just seemed like he was missing something. I finally asked him, 'Have you ever thought about God? Maybe God is moving in your life right now in a way you don't realize.'

"He looked at me with a surprised look on his

face and said, 'Why do you say this?' I told him about how important my faith is in my life. I told him how I pray to God each day and how I feel God's presence in my life at work and at home in my relationships. Then he said, 'I've been praying a lot lately to God for direction and meaning. How do I get answers?'

"I realized then that this conversation on the sidelines of the soccer field was God giving me an opportunity to witness about my faith. At the end of the conversation, I asked this man if he wanted to know more about the difference it makes in life to have faith in God. We decided to take the kids out for ice cream and talk more about God, faith, and life."

When we are receptive, God will often place us in situations that allow us to witness to our Christian faith.

When we recognize that God is already at work in the lives of the people around us, we can lower our anxiety and reluctance to talk about Christ. As we grow in our ability to witness, we affirm that God will work through us.

BIBLE FOCUS: Acts 8:26-39

Invite participants to read the story by dividing the verses between the different characters: Narrator, Angel of the Lord, Philip, the Holy Spirit, and the Ethiopian eunuch. Conclude the reading by sharing or reading the following:

Philip discovered that God had already been preparing the Ethiopian eunuch for this faith sharing conversation. Because Philip was willing to go where the Holy Spirit sent him, the Gospel reached a receptive inquirer. This incident is also significant because it is the first record of the spread of the Gospel in Africa.

The Ethiopian eunuch was a man of high social standing and prestige, a court official with considerable influence. Philip showed genuine interest in the man and his questions. Phillip shared the story of faith with the Ethiopian eunuch in his own words. The story concludes with the Ethiopian eunuch responding with joy to his baptism!

Discuss as a group inviting participants to make personal notes in their journals.

1. Do you think Philip waited until he found “just the right words” to answer the Ethiopian eunuch’s questions? Why or why not?
 2. How did Philip initiate conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch (v. 31)? What kinds of questions which might lead you into a faith sharing conversation could you ask another person?
 3. Tell about a time when you were surprised to discover that you were engaged in a faith sharing conversation. What happened? How did it come about? What did you say?
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Continue your learning by reviewing Tips and Tools for Creative Faith Sharing on pp 6-7. Reflect on the following questions together.

1. What insights did you glean about faith sharing as you reviewed this list of ideas?
2. With what four or five ideas might you be interested in experimenting?

JOURNAL TIME

Read the following paragraph and take several minutes for participants to record their thoughts about the questions in their journals. When everyone has completed their work, pair up to share reflections with each other.

God’s story is powerful. It changes people’s lives. It is a story of hope and salvation with life and death consequences. What does this mean? The “good news” is that God loves the whole world and each of us individually. Because of that great love, God did not leave us defenseless to deal with our own sin, the sin of others, the power of death or the devil. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we have been made whole; we have been forgiven of our sins; we have been promised eternal life with God. This means

that we are not captive to the destructive forces of the world and our own self-destruction. This “good news” has eternal impact. It has changed lives and communities everywhere. It has changed your life!

Think for a moment about the “good news” story of the Gospel. Write down answers to these questions:

1. How has being a Christian made a difference in your life?
2. What is “the good news” about Christ for you? What would you say if someone asked you this question?

Going

Final thoughts

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his followers: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). We have received the power of the Holy Spirit in our baptism to be witnesses to the Gospel. God prepares other people to hear and respond to the Gospel. God promises to be with us in our efforts to share our faith with others.

CLOSING PRAYER

Go around the circle and ask each person to name one way they hope to engage in faith sharing in the coming week. Invite participants to record their commitment in their journal. Then, in circle prayer, have each participant pray for the person on their right for openness to witness in the coming week. .

Join in the Lord’s Prayer

Tips for Creative and Courageous Faith Sharing

In the course of daily life

- *Wear a cross or a religious symbol. You may be surprised how many times this will start a conversation about your faith.*
- *Pray before a meal, especially with family and friends, but also in public places.*
- *Refer to your church, your faith and the Bible in casual conversation with others.*
- *Respond "Thank God!" or "God is Good!" when someone shares an uplifting story with you.*
- *Say "I will pray for you" when someone shares a personal concern or difficulty with you.*
- *Send a card or note of encouragement that offer words of blessing and that conveys your faith and trust in God.*
- *Be courteous and helpful in all public transactions; look for ways to give a verbal and positive witness to the hope that is within you.*
- *As you walk through your day, scatter blessings. Some will take root and grow.*
- *Share a smile and personal greeting with a stranger.*
- *Seek ways to turn times of tension and conflict into moments of blessing.*
- *Offer a "God word" in conversations about current public events (e.g., "this situation, war, natural disaster, famine surely makes me thankful for God and the way God's people are working to make this world a better place").*
- *Ask someone you may have hurt for forgiveness.*
- *Model Christian behavior when you coach or attend your child's sporting events.*
- *Speak up against injustice, evil and verbal insult.*
- *Be clear that your perspective is informed by your faith and belief in a loving, forgiving God.*
- *In moments when God is used thoughtlessly or maliciously, speak up and say "Excuse me, you're talking about someone who is very important to me."*
- *In talking about the weather or scenery, marvel at the intricate beauty of God's creation.*
- *Carry tracts or cards of encouragement and distribute them, when appropriate, at the office and other places where people gather.*
- *Decorate your office with symbols or pictures that say something about your faith or could invite conversation about God.*
- *Offer affirmation to colleagues for a job well done; share how thankful you are to God for their gifts.*
- *Carry your faith over into your work by insisting on fair prices, good products and just treatment of customers and employees.*

- Share what motivates you to stand up for these values.
- Take a colleague to lunch and share something about how God is working in your life or something in which you have recently been involved at your church.
- Remember birthdays, job transitions, etc., with notes of blessing and encouragement.
- Invite a colleague to come with you to worship or to participate in church-related activities.
- Host a lunch time Bible study once a week for those who might be interested. Check with your employer first.

In times of struggle and pain

- Visit neighbors, friends and colleagues when they are sick or hospitalized.
- Share a devotional booklet and offer a prayer.
- Deliver a meal or plate of cookies to the family or person struggling with loss, tragedy or illness.
- Share a cassette tape of uplifting, encouraging Christian music.
- Mow the lawn, shovel the driveway, buy groceries or clean the house without waiting to be asked. Then share why you were motivated to care in such a way.
- Recognize the variety of issues that bring pain to people's lives (financial crisis or loss, death, illness, divorce, abuse, etc.) and seek to respond in helpful ways.
- Be a listening ear.
- Share how God has carried you in moments of personal struggle. Send cards more than once, with encouraging words of Scripture.

In your neighborhood

- Host a new neighbors BBQ when someone new moves into the neighborhood. Offer a prayer before eating.
- Be public, in subtle ways, about your faith.
- Coordinate a block party. Plan activities that foster friendships for the kids. Plan games that encourage sharing about life and values.
- Gather children in the neighborhood for an afternoon Kids' Club. Share Bible stories and tapes, craft activities, refreshments and positive play.
- Find creative ways to help neighbors in times of need with a bag of groceries, some help around the house or apartment, a card, flowers, or a listening ear.
- Deliver a plate of cookies or a loaf of bread for no particular reason at all.
- Warmly introduce yourself to newcomers and ask if they will be looking for a church to attend. Invite them to yours.

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In your home and with your family

- Witness your faith with your own family by gently stating “I believe...”
- Commit to regular prayer before meals and family devotions. Commit family needs, struggles and decisions to prayer.
- Play Christian music when listening to background music.
- Monitor the television viewing of your children; take time to explain why as a Christian you might find something acceptable or unacceptable.
- Use “God language” in your conversation with children and other family members.
- Model your faith by taking time for daily devotions and Bible study.
- Model stewardship and hospitality by giving money or food to people in need.
- Share a Bible story with your children before bedtime.
- Take time to talk about what you experienced at worship. Encourage sharing of key learnings from church or Sunday school.

At times of life passage and celebration

- Remember birthdays, baptisms, first communions, confirmations, anniversaries, weddings, funerals, graduations, birth or adoption of a child, a move into a new home or apartment, job transitions, etc., as special times, with a word of blessing and affirmation through cards, letters, phone calls or in person.
- Give someone a special Bible musical tape, or devotional booklet and write a personal note about your faith inside the cover.
- Take time to share an affirming message with another through a note, e-mail or letter.
- Plan a party or celebration, especially if it appears one wouldn’t otherwise happen.
- Take your friend to lunch or out for dessert. Find special ways to celebrate achievements.

At holiday and “holy day” times

- Invite friends and neighbors to church at Christmas or Easter. Some are more willing to attend then.
- Look for creative ways to invite a friend, neighbor or co-worker to worship or to a special holiday event.
- At Christmas time, provide faith-related gifts and storybooks to neighbor children, teachers, and friends.
- Share why Christmas and Easter are times of celebration for you and your family.
- Host a Thanksgiving party for your neighbors.
- Find ways to help others reflect on their blessings, helping others reflect on their blessing.

Excerpted from Tips and Tools for Creative Faith Sharing In Daily Life, ELCA, 1996. Used by permission.

Session 2

Be Ready to Share the Hope Within You

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

As your group gathers, encourage conversation by responding to the following questions. You might set the tone by beginning the sharing.

1. During the past week, did God give you an opportunity to witness about your faith to another person? If so, what happened?
2. Name one thing you fear about growing stronger in your ability to share your faith (e.g., "I fear I won't have answers to the questions someone asks me. I fear I'll get tongue-tied").

Let's pray

Pray, or ask a volunteer to pray, the following prayer aloud. Or speak another prayer of your choosing.

God of all ages, throughout history you have called your people to give account of the hope within them. Bless our efforts to share your story with others. In our moments of reluctance and excuse, remind us of your promise to be with us and give us the words we need to speak about you. Bless this time of growth. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud. You might read this material ahead of time and simply share it with the group.

"I had no idea Jerry had just gotten rid of a water softener salesperson he had been trying to get out of his house for two hours when I knocked on his door. Jerry opened the door with a scowl. I introduced myself as a new pastor in town starting a new Lutheran church. He grabbed the brochure and slammed the door in my face.

Two weeks later, Jerry's wife called me. Debbie was mortified at what he had done. She had been praying for their family to have a stronger relationship with God. She apologized and explained that Jerry had grown up in a family that hated God and the church. I invited them to church and the next Sunday they came.

Two days later, during a follow-up visit, Jerry invited me into the house, sat me in a chair next to a table, propped the lamp shade back, exposing me to the glare of a bright light, and proceeded to interrogate me. For two hours he grilled me about the Christian faith. He was testing me to see if this faith was real to me, not how much I knew about it.

"When he was satisfied that I believed in Christ, that this was a living relationship for me, he relaxed and began to ask the real questions about Jesus. They were back the next Sunday and the next. In fact, they became active charter members of this ELCA mission congregation.

"Jerry is now the coordinator of our small groups and probably one of the best apologists in the congregation. His journey is a reminder to me that the most important part of my faith sharing is when I share how real Christ is to me! I don't need to fear saying the wrong words, because God will always give them to me. I need to trust that."

continued

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BIBLE FOCUS: Acts 8:26-39

Invite participants to read the story by dividing up the verses between the different characters of the story as follows: Narrator, God, Moses. Ask for volunteers who will read the different parts of the characters in the story. Read Exodus 3—the entire chapter—through Exodus 4:17. Discuss the following questions as a group. Encourage all to make personal notes in participant journals.

1. Was Moses an eager witness for God? Why or why not?
2. Name the excuses Moses gave for why he could not respond to God's call (Hint: Re-read the following verses from Exodus) 3:11, 3:13, 4:1,4:10,4:13.
3. Which of these excuses seem especially real for you? Why?
4. When you think about sharing your faith, are there questions you are afraid someone will ask that you won't be able to answer? What are those questions?

Conclude your study of Moses by reading or sharing the following.

Jesus asked his disciples this simple question, "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15-16). Since Jesus walked the earth, the spread of Christianity has been dependent on the everyday witness of Christians. The words and actions of Christians make a profound difference in whether or not the "good news of Jesus" is shared with others. Who do YOU say Jesus is?

JOURNAL TIME

Review the information on faith-sharing strategies on pp. 10-11 in teams of two. Discuss each idea and journal personal reflections as you work. Decide which two or three ideas might be helpful for you to consider as a way to strengthen your own faith sharing ability. When everyone has completed their work, share your thoughts as a large group. What commitments are you willing to make individually and as a congregation to carry your good intent forward from this study?

Going Final thoughts

Read or share aloud:

Peter wrote to the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, these words: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is within you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15b-16a). We need to be prepared with words for conversations where God will place us. Some of those conversations will be with people ready and receptive to hear the story of salvation. Some of those conversations will be with people antagonistic to the church or faith. In all conversations, we need to trust that God will give us the words to say.

CLOSING PRAYER

Join hands and read this closing prayer; conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

God of Abraham and Sarah, God of Isaac and Rebekah, God of Jacob and Rachel, God of Moses, Aaron and Miriam, we pray for your Spirit to be with us in our witnessing. As you have spoken through your servants of old, speak through us today and empower us in our faith sharing. Bless our words and make us ready to give a defense for the hope that is within us. In the name of the Hope of the World, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Faith-sharing strategies: Assessing your strengths

Consider the following strategies you might engage to strengthen your faith-sharing ability. Assess each strategy using the three bulleted statements below. Where do you sense a need for personal attention and growth? What two or three “strategies” do you feel would best warrant your attention? What might you consider as next steps to deepen your commitment?

- I’ve already done this.
- I could revisit this.
- I definitely need to do this.

I regularly pray for boldness and confidence.

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened” (Luke 11: 9-10). If you have found yourself to be a reluctant witness, begin in prayer. If you have been an active confessor of the faith, stay constant in prayer. Prayer is the foundation of all witness. It is essential for a Christian who desires to be bold in faith sharing. It is critical for a congregation that wants to move members to greater confidence in witness. Pray for boldness and confidence to share the faith like Peter and John: “For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

I have practiced writing and telling my own faith story.

God will use your story to touch the lives of others. However, unless you rehearse your own story, it may be difficult for you to think it through “on the spot.” Take time to write down how you would respond to these questions. Try to limit your responses to about 100 words—answers you could share briefly with others.

- What does it mean to you to be a Christian?
- How has being a Christian or a member of a church made a difference in your life?

- Why are you baptized?
- When has Christ felt most real to you?
- What are the high points and struggles of your own faith journey?
- How is Christ Lord of your life?

Be sure that you practice telling your faith story in language that is clear, concise and understandable to someone unfamiliar with Christianity. Your story is probably a lot more interesting than you realize. Personal faith stories most often evoke conversation, not argument.

I have researched and developed answers to basic faith questions.

Spend time reading and investigating answers to basic questions which someone unfamiliar to Christianity might have about the faith:

- Is God really real?
- Can I believe the Bible?
- Why should I believe in Jesus?
- Did Jesus really rise from the dead?
- How do I know the Bible is not just made up?
- Aren't all world religions the same?
- Why does God allow human suffering?
- How come bad things happen to good people?

Challenge yourself to dig into your faith a little deeper by engaging in study and reflection on the difficult questions of faith and life. “Christian apologetics” is the term given for this discipline.

continued

I am learning to trust in God.

Your fear may be great, but God's promises are greater! Like Moses, God sends us to be messengers of good news and promises to be with us. "Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at the time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:19-20). Think of yourself as the minor player in the game of witnessing. Minimize yourself and maximize the needs of the other person and God's story. You will be amazed at how your self-consciousness disappears when you allow God's story of salvation to flow through you into the life of another person.

I'm serious about investing in relationships with people outside my church.

The longer you are a Christian, the greater likelihood you will have fewer and fewer unchurched friends. Why? Because Christians like being together and tend to cluster with each other in places called churches. How can we be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world," if we spend time only with other Christians?

In his book, *Living Proof*, Jim Petersen states: "If we are going to engage the people of our generation, it will only happen on their turf."² One of the best ways to grow in your ability to share your faith is by being friends with people outside the church. Those friendships will keep you in touch with the real hopes, fears and trials of people who do not have a conscious connection to God. They will help you be sensitive to the language and issues of real life for non-Christians and they will help you hone your faith sharing skills with ordinary people in the context of everyday life.

I have cultivated the art of listening.

Active, caring listening is at the heart of effective faith sharing. If we don't listen well, no matter how well-intentioned, people will experience our witnessing as manipulative and condescending. "People-blindness is a major obstacle to our evangelization. Too often because we do not know, understand, or sensitively listen to our neighbor, we do not know what faith questions our neighbor may be asking. Our lack of understanding, then, often leads us to give answers to questions that no one around us is asking.

You cannot share your own faith pilgrimage until you are willing to get to know who your neighbor is not in a nosy sort of way, but in a way that says, "I care about you, I'm interested in you, and I want to get to know you."³ The art of effective listening means we close our mouths and open our eyes and ears.

I am helping to grow a positive climate for faith sharing in my congregation.

One of the best ways you can help grow a positive climate for faith sharing is by encouraging members to practice this Christian behavior within the walls of the church. Create a safe space for faith sharing within your congregation and there will be no stopping members from sharing their faith outside it!

Session 3

Tell How Much God Has Done for You

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

As your group gathers, ask people to sit next to someone they do not know well. Describe the following exercise as an opportunity to strengthen listening skills. Divide into groups of three, with each person taking one of the roles of "talker," "listener," and "observer." Give each person a chance to share their story using the following: "Share about the time you first fell in love" and "Talk about someone who influenced your faith journey." The listener should focus his or her attention on the talker and the story being told. The observer should watch and observe the interaction between the talker and the listener. After this exercise, encourage conversation about the experience by discussing the following questions.

1. Talkers: What did it feel like to share about someone who had a significant impact on your faith story? Was there a difference between your two stories? Did you feel "heard"? If so, why?

2. Listeners: How did it feel to listen to these stories? How did you communicate to the talker that you were listening?

3. Observers: What were the signs indicating that active listening was happening in these conversations?

Make a list with two columns. In the first column, ask each participant to name the person and relationship they chose who had an impact on their faith development (e.g., friend, mother, neighbor). In the second column, have each person name the form of faith sharing in which this person engaged in which had such a profound effect on their faith life (e.g., invited me to church, prayed with me, helped me when I was going through a personal crisis).

Let's pray

Pray aloud the following prayer or another of your choosing.

God of love, you have formed us in human community and made us for relationships. Through families, friends, neighbors and co-workers you weave into our

lives the power and influence of your love for all people. Bless us this day as we reflect on the web of personal relationships which are a part of our lives. Make us bold witnesses, confident in faith sharing, and sensitive in listening to others. May your saving grace be known through us to all people who have contact with us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Growing

Two role plays set the stage for this session's reflections. Invite group members to act out the following scenarios and consider the variety of faith-sharing responses possible with each story. Act out each role play at least twice. A quote and questions for group reflection follow.

Role-play #1 — At the office

Mary and Susan sit with each other every day at lunch. They leave their desks around noon each day and find a table in the lunch room where they can talk. Recently, Mary has begun to share that her marriage relationship with her husband is deteriorating. Susan has been listening intently and is trying as best she can to support her friend.

Role play #2 — At the gym

Glenn and Jack use adjacent lockers and usually end up hitting the gym about the same time each afternoon. Their conversation has been mostly superficial guy-to-guy interactions on their way into gym clothes or heading out to the machines. One day, Jack grumbles his frustration with "his kids." Glenn responds by sharing a bit about his two kids. Jack says, "try TWENTY-TWO kids, revealing his job as a teacher. He continues to share his personal needs and struggles as a teacher. Glenn responds by...

Read and discuss as a group the following quote and questions.

"Telling and inviting form the centerpiece of the witnessing experience once we have found our target focus. Not that everything else that happens before the telling and inviting isn't important. But telling and

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inviting is the time when we share our faith story; Jesus becomes the focus, the Holy Spirit goes to work in a powerful way, and the invitation is offered. Because most people will hear about Jesus and will come to trust him as their Savior as a result of a personal relationship, it makes sense for us to intentionally foster and develop these special relationships.”⁴

1. Was it easy to move these conversations to a faith level? Why or why not?
2. What do you wish might have been said? How could each witness have been strengthened?
3. What do these role plays reveal about how to share our faith stories? (e.g., it happens in relationships, over time, focused on presenting needs.)

BIBLE FOCUS: *Mark 5:1-20*

Invite one participant in your group to read the Bible story of the Gerasene demoniac aloud to the whole group. Discuss the following questions as a group, making personal notes in participant journals.

1. How and why did the demoniac come into contact with Jesus (Vs. 1)?
2. What was the response of the demoniac to his miraculous healing at the command of Jesus (v. 18)?
3. Jesus didn't need a groupie, he needed a witness! Where and to whom did Jesus command the healed man to go (v. 19)?
4. What happened when the man returned to his community and shared the news about Jesus (v. 20)?

JOURNAL TIME

Take a few minutes to record in your journal your response to this question: Where and to whom does Jesus send you today to witness? List as many names as possible of people with whom you come into contact over the period of a week. Then circle the names of those persons who have at one time or another seemed “faith hungry” or interested in issues of God, your beliefs, or faith issues. Underline the names of people who are going through a period of transition or crisis in their personal lives. Star those who do not have a relationship with Christ or a church that bears his name. Discuss your answers. Plan together how you might reach out to some of the people named. If possible, select one person you have named and write out a plan for how you might move to a deeper level of faith conversation with this person, possibly even inviting this person to come with you to worship or a special congregation event.

Going

Final thoughts

Read or share aloud:

Invitation is the heart of effective evangelism! It is the oldest form of evangelism recorded in the New Testament. John's Gospel tells about Philip and Nathanael. Philip invited Nathanael to meet the Messiah with the simple invitation: “come and see.” This form of invitation evangelism is also effective today. Friends bring friends to Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER

Join hands and ask each person to pray for 1) courage to boldly invite their friends, relatives, associates and neighbors to church, and 2) an opportunity to invite (name) to worship or another church event in the near future. Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Session 4

Send Laborers into the Harvest

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

As your group gathers, invite conversations using the following questions.

1. What opportunities did God provide you this week to share your faith with your friends, relatives, associates and neighbors?
2. Describe one "gift" you believe God has given you related to your faith sharing (e.g., God has given me the gift of hospitality. I enjoy entertaining guests. God has given me the gift of 'gab'. I get into conversations a lot with strangers! My gift is fixing things. My neighbors are always asking me to help fix things that are broken).

Let's pray

Pray aloud the following prayer or another one of your choosing.

God of all creation, you have gifted your creation and your people with many gifts. Teach us the ways we are to use your gifts in "fishing" for other people. Bless our lives that we might be laborers for you in harvesting new disciples. Help us to use our unique gifts, talents, temperament and personalities to be bold witnesses and eager evangelists as we spread your Gospel to the whole world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Growing

BIBLE FOCUS: Luke 5:1-11

Read the passage aloud. Discuss the following questions, inviting participants to make personal notes in their journals.

1. Why was Simon Peter reluctant to put his fishing nets in the water even as Jesus commanded him to do so (v. 5)?
2. What was the big surprise Peter experienced (vv. 6-7)?
3. What are the implications for this story in our journey as witnesses to the Gospel (v. 9)?
4. What is Jesus' commission to his disciples then and today (v. 10b)?

Conclude your reflections on Peter by reading and discussing: "A Fishing Story" on page 18.

JOURNAL TIME

During the next time block, you will discover and reflect on your preferred style for witness and faith sharing. Follow the directions in the box on page 16. When everyone has completed their individual work and reflection talk together as a group about implications.

Session 4 *continued from page 15*

Going

Final thoughts

Read or share aloud:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38). God has called and equipped us as members of the body of Christ with a variety of gifts, including evangelism or fishing styles. The Christian life calls us to use those gifts so that those who are eager and ripe to hear the good news will have the chance to know Jesus Christ. In spite of our excuses or fears, God gives us the power to witness with friends, relatives, associates, neighbors and strangers. We are the body of Christ, we are the ones who can invite others to “come and see” the Savior who changes lives. If we do not fish, who will?

CLOSING PRAYER

In preparation for the closing prayer, ask participants to share how they plan to make use of their discoveries following this small group study. Once everyone has shared, invite participants to take turns praying aloud for the person on their right, asking God to bless their faith-sharing ministry. Close with the Lord's Prayer.

What Is Your Evangelism Style?²

One of the best ways to improve your faith sharing is to know your preferred (God-given) witness style and then work on strengthening it. Each of the six evangelism styles listed below makes a unique contribution to the process of fishing for people in the name of Jesus Christ.

Place a check mark along side those traits that sound most like you. Visually determine which style is most like you by the number of checks. You may discover that you operate out of more than one preferred style. Read the narrative descriptions following this exercise to corroborate your discoveries and to connect your faith style to a biblical character and story. Note: this is not a scientific instrument of accuracy. You should however be able to discern in broad strokes how God has wired you as an evangelist.

Confrontational

- ☐ Confident
- ☐ Bold
- ☐ Direct
- ☐ Skips small talk, gets right to the point
- ☐ Has strong opinions and convictions

Intellectual

- ☐ Analytical
- ☐ Logical
- ☐ Inquisitive
- ☐ Likes to debate ideas
- ☐ More concerned with what people think than what they feel

Testimonial

- ☐ Clear communicator
- ☐ Good listener
- ☐ Vulnerable about ups and downs of personal life
- ☐ Overwhelmed by account of how God reached them
- ☐ Sees links between their own experience and others'

Interpersonal

- ☐ Conversational
- ☐ Compassionate
- ☐ Sensitive
- ☐ Friendship-oriented
- ☐ Focuses on people and their needs

Invitational

- ☐ Hospitable
- ☐ Persuasive
- ☐ Enjoys meeting new people
- ☐ Committed to things he/she believes in
- ☐ Sees outreach events as unique opportunities

Serving

- ☐ Patient
- ☐ Others-centered
- ☐ Sees needs and finds joy in meeting them
- ☐ Shows love through actions more than words
- ☐ Attaches value even to menial tasks

Evangelism Styles Unpacked

Confrontational style

The apostle Peter had a confrontational style of evangelism. In Acts 2:14, he took a stand, raised his voice and said, “Listen carefully to what I say.” Then in verse 40, he told the crowd they crucified the wrong man—the Son of God. He then exhorted the crowd to repent, saying “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Peter’s confrontational style was a frontal assault that required confidence and courage. And it was effective! Over 3,000 people trusted Christ after Peter shared the Gospel. The fact is, some people will only be reached when they are confronted courageously and straightforwardly with the message of Christ. Thankfully, some people are uniquely designed by God to be able to use a confrontational style of evangelism.

Intellectual style

In Acts 17, the apostle Paul is trying to spread the message of Jesus to philosophers and scholars of the city of Athens. He uses intellectual reasoning with those who will listen: in the synagogues with the Jews and in the marketplace with the God-fearing Gentiles. Some of the philosophers conversed and debated with him. As you read this passage, you will discover Paul used an ingenious approach. He made reference to an altar in their city dedicated “to an unknown God” and then wove that into the point of his message. Paul’s approach was an intellectual one. It was a thinking approach that appealed to the listeners’ sense of reason.

Testimonial style

In the ninth chapter of John there is a story of a blind man who was miraculously healed by Jesus. After his sight was restored, everyone kept asking about the one who healed him. They questioned him, saying, “Could it be the Messiah, the Son of God who healed you?” The man admitted he did not have all the answers to their questions, but told them what he knew for certain: “I was blind but now I see.” It’s as if he said, “Draw your own conclusions. I’ve drawn mine; I know who it was.” This is an example of a testimonial approach to evangelism. In this approach, someone experiences a miraculous transformation through the presence of Jesus

Christ and then simply looks for opportunities to tell their story to others. They are not confrontational or reason-focused, but they can tell their own story in a way that connects with a listener. They can say, “I was spiritually blind, but now I see. Christ changed my life, and he can change yours!”

Interpersonal style

When Matthew came to faith, he realized his tax-collecting friends still didn’t know Jesus. So he decided to throw a party! This “party with a purpose” was strategically designed to get his friends to rub shoulders with Jesus and his disciples. Although all of us need to build relationships with those whom we hope to reach, those with this style of evangelism specialize in this area. They are able to go deeper relationally with a greater number of people and to become partners with their friends in their journey toward Christ.

Invitational style

In John, chapter 4, we find the famous story of the woman at the well and another style of evangelism. Convinced that she had been talking to the Son of God, and rather than retell everything in her own words, the woman at the well left her water pots and ran into the city to invite people to come and hear what Jesus had to say! Some people are more comfortable inviting a friend to hear someone else teach or tell about Jesus. The woman at the well had a great impact because she invited many people to come and hear Jesus.

Serving style

In Acts 9, we read about a woman named Dorcas who had an enormous impact for Christ in her community because of her habit of doing deeds of kindness. Dorcas made garments for the poor and forgotten people in her city and then distributed them in the name of Christ. Dorcas modeled servant evangelism. Dorcas served people, and in her service to them, she pointed them to the One who could forgive and transform. She may never have preached a sermon or knocked on a door; but she used her love and service as a vehicle to share the Gospel.⁵

A Fishing Story

Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Week after week, month after month, and year after year, these who called themselves fishermen, met in meetings and talked about their call to go about fishing.

Continually they searched for new and better methods of fishing and for new and better definitions of fishing. They sponsored costly nationwide and worldwide congresses to discuss and promote fishing and hear about all the ways of fishing, such as the new fishing equipment, fish calls, and whether any new bait was discovered.

These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called "Fishing Headquarters." The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they didn't do, however; they didn't fish.

All the fishermen seemed to agree that what was needed was a board which could challenge fishermen to be faithful in fishing. The board was formed by those who had the great vision and courage to speak about fishing, to define fishing, and to promote the

idea of fishing in far away streams and lakes where many other fish of different colors lived.

Large, elaborate, and expensive training centers, whose purpose was to teach fishermen how to fish, were built. Those who taught had doctorates in fishology. But the teachers did not fish. They only taught fishing.

Some spent much money on study and travel to learn the history of fishing and to see faraway places where the founding fathers did great fishing in the centuries past. They lauded the faithful fishermen of years before who handed down the idea of fishing.

Many who felt the call to be fishers responded. They were commissioned and sent to fish. And they went off to foreign lands...to teach fishing.

Now it's true that many of the fishers sacrificed and put up with all kinds of difficulties. Some lived near the water and bore the smell of dead fish every day. They received the ridicule of some who made fun of their fishers' clubs. They anguished over those who were not committed enough to attend the weekly meetings to talk about fishing. After all, were they not following the Master who said, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people?'

Imagine how hurt some were when one day a person suggested that those who don't catch fish were really not fishers, no matter how much they claimed to be. Yet it did sound correct. Is a person a fisher if year after year s/he never catches a fish? Is one following if s/he isn't fishing?"⁶

Endnotes

1) This is a paraphrase of a story shared by Pastor Andrew Hagen. As an ELCA pastor-developer, he has knocked on thousands of doors in Bolingbrook, Illinois, in laboring with the Holy Spirit to develop a new congregation, Joyful Spirit Lutheran Church. He shared this story as a part of a Bible study presented at the Northern Illinois Synod Assembly, June 19, 1998, in Rock Island, Illinois.

2) Jim Petersen, *Living Proof: Sharing the Gospel Naturally*, NavPress, Colorado Springs, 1989.

3) Charles Van Engen, *You Are My Witnesses: Drawing from Your Spiritual Journey to Evangelize Your Neighbors*, Reformed Church Press, New York, 1992. pg 29.

4) Michael E. Gibson, *Out of the Bleachers and onto the Field: How to Witness without Hang-Ups*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1992, pgs. 109 & 110. To order this resource, call 800/869-6444.

5) Adapted from *Becoming a Contagious Christian Participant's Guide*, Zondervan/Willow Creek Resources, by Mittleberg, Strobel and Hybels. 1995, Willow Creek Association. Used by permission. This guide is part of a training course which includes a more complete questionnaire that can help you further identify your evangelism style, as well as give you practical steps for developing that style. For more information on the Becoming a Contagious Christian evangelism course, call Willow Creek Direct, 800/570-9812.

6) Adapted from Win Arn, *The Pastor's Church Growth Handbook*, vol. I, Church Growth, Inc., Monrovia, 1979, pgs. 151-154.

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