

Family Stories

Chalice Lighting

For none of us ever really walks in another's shoes or knows the innermost rooms of a person's heart. None of us truly knows the lonely places of another's journey or the causes of the lines around another's eyes. Therefore, let us be gentle with one another. Let us listen more than we speak and accept more than we judge. Let our open, outstretched hands reach and touch that we may walk along together for a little while in friendship and in trust.

Elizabeth Tarbox

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings:

Family stories tell us who we are and to whom we belong. They cement us together in remembered intimacy. Our stories also point to the values we hold in common from family generation to family generation.

Rev. Pat Hoertdoerfer

All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.

Isak Dinesen

A family is one of nature's masterpieces.

George Santayana

Each of us brings a separate truth here. We bring the truth of our own life, our own story. We don't come as empty vessels, but rather we come as full people -- people who have our own story and our own truth. We seek to add to our truths and add to our stories. This room is rich with truth, rich

with experience. All manner of people are here: needy, joyful, frightened, anxious, bored. We all bring our truth with us. May we all recognize the truth and the story in everyone's life. And may we hear and honor the truths that we all bring as we gather together. Together we have truths. Together we have a story. Together we are a community.

Penny Hackett-Evans

Stories ought not to be just little bits of fantasy that are used to wiled away an idle hour; from the beginning of the human race stories have been used – by priests, by bards, by medicine men – as magic instruments of healing, of teaching, as a means of helping people come to terms with the fact that they continually have to face insoluble problems and unbearable realities.

Joan Aiken

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round I Who was, or is, the main storyteller in your family?

Round II Share some of your memories of stories told within your family. Tell where you were when you heard the stories, how old were you, who told them? Choose a brief story you can tell to the group. Explain its origin in the family and meaning to you. Share photographs if you have them.

Round III What did you discover about stories in your family during this session? What has been most meaningful to you?

Closing Words and Song “Go Now in Peace”

The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.

Muriel Rukeyser

Group Business - Pass out homework for the next session.

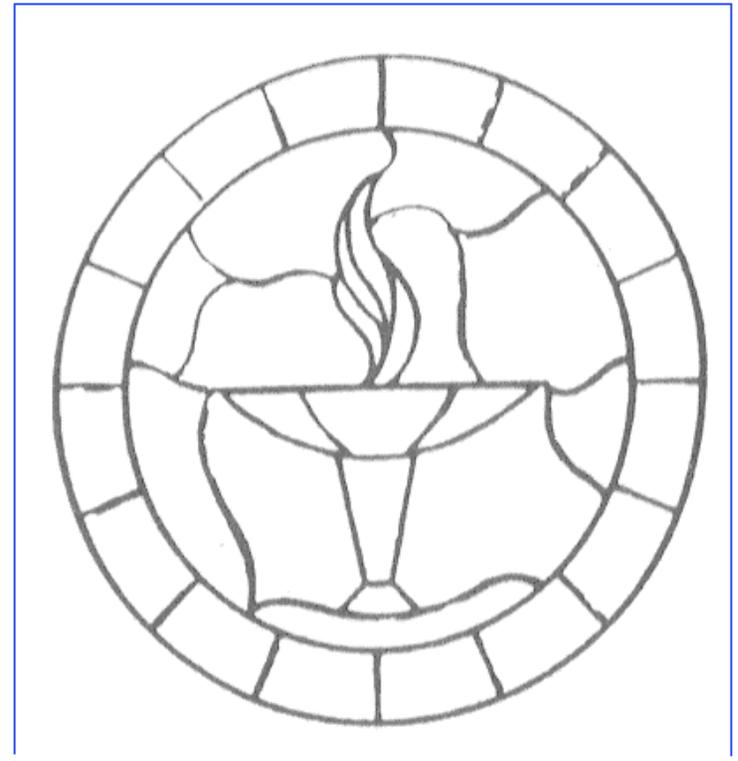
Covenant Groups

Family Stories

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group.
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent.
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others.
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories.
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn.



Leader's Notes for Family Stories

This session focuses on family stories, tales about people, places, and events related to members of the immediate family, grandparents, and their ancestors. Be aware that it is possible that one or more members of your group may not remember family stories or may not consider that even short event descriptions (who said what to whom and why) are stories. If someone gets stuck, you might comment that family stories can be as uncomplicated as conversations that begin with the phrase "the time when" or are ideas about "who we are" as a family and expressed as given truths, such as "we always..." A leading question might be "how did your grandparents meet each other and who told you about how that happened?" It is also interesting to consider why stories may be absent from a family's interactions.

Chalice Lighting: (2 Min)

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin

Sharing of Joys and Concerns: (10 Min)

Ask group members to tell in one or two sentences...How you are today? Share information about absent members.

Silence: (3 Min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence. Time it!

Shared Readings: (10 Min)

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read from Shared Readings found in the bulletin until all readings are finished.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening: Do your rounds of deep sharing/deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure all get to share at least once.

Round I (10 min)

Who was, or is, the main storyteller in your family?

Round II (40 min)

Share some of your memories of stories told within your family. Tell where you were when you heard the stories, how old were you, who told them? Choose a brief story you can tell to the group. Explain its origin in the family and meaning to you. Share photographs if you have them.

Round III (10 min)

What did you discover about stories in your family during this session? What has been most meaningful to you?

Closing Words and Song "Go Now in Peace" (2 min)

Read the following: The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.

Muriel Rukeyser

Group Business (3 min)

Pass out Q and Q (homework) for next time.

Family Stories

Family stories are tales about people, places, and events related to members of our immediate family, our grandparents, and their ancestors. The memorable stories of our lives and of others in our family take on special importance because they are true, even if everyone tells different versions of the same event. These tales, no matter their content, are family heirlooms.

Every life is a story, and life begins in families - no matter their size or shape. The stories our family members tell us color how we receive all other stories throughout life, and in turn, these stories color the stories we choose to tell.

Christiane Brems, University of Alaska at Anchorage, tells us that storytelling allows families to transmit family lore and values. Family narratives are stories made up by family members and may be based on real occurrences, embellished events, or fantasy material. Family stories can be new or old. Some family stories cross generations and give strong messages about the historical background of the family, the hardships they have endured, and the values that have helped them carry on. Some stories span a single generation but carry strong messages, perhaps of survival, perhaps of joy. Other stories are new, perhaps created to help a family or particular members cope with a current situation. All family stories are told for a reason, even if that reason is purely for entertainment. Many families have cherished family stories that are cause for laughter year after year. Family stories are always that: they are about the family.

Rachael Remen, physician and author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, tells us that everyone's story matters. The wisdom in the story of the most educated and powerful person is often not greater than the wisdom in the story of a child, and the life of a child can teach us as much as the life of a sage. Hidden in all stories is the One Story. The more we listen, the clearer that story becomes. In telling stories, we are telling each other the human story.

There is an ancient African teaching that "we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us." A deep respect for one's ancestors is an integral part of many cultures. Retelling the stories of our roots enables us to touch the past, obtain a new and different perspective on the present, and enables us to look to the future with renewed hope. For some, memories of growing up can be so intertwined with stories told by parents and other relatives that it is difficult to distinguish between what are really memories and what was told in the form of a story.

Stories reveal the powers that provide orientation in people's lives. Carol Christ, feminist theologian, writes that when people talk about books or movies that touched them, about people they have loved or wanted to emulate, they speak of that elusive sense of meaning, power, and value that roots their stories in something deeper. This depth dimension of stories is crucial, for without it lives would seem empty.

Family Stories – every family has them. Told at gatherings of the relatives or the extended family, they are those stories about "the time when" that help family define their identity and stay in touch with who they are.

Donald Davis

A young woman once asked an old woman, "What is life's heaviest burden?" And the old woman replied, "To have nothing to carry."

Jewish Tale

A lie hides the truth. A story tries to find it.

Paula Fox

A good story knows more than its teller.

John O'Donohue

Homework:

Think of your family, your parents, siblings, if you have them—aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Remember the stories you heard as a child, about where your grandparents and their parents came from, how they lived, about your parents' lives as children, about who said what to whom when and why. If you have old photographs of your family that might illustrate your stories, please consider bringing them to the Family Stories session.

1. Think of stories told within your extended family. Stories may have been told at holidays, weddings, and funerals, or they may have been part of your everyday life as a child. Who was the primary storyteller in your family? Jot down a few notes about some of your family stories. You will be asked to share one or two at the Family Stories session. Consider the following:

- What or who were your family stories about? How do you know the history of your family? Was it through stories? For example, your family may have a story about how a particularly severe winter affected them, or there may be stories about how your grandparents met and married.
- What were the "truths" about your family that were taken for granted within the family unit? Some families consider themselves "born rebels" or say about themselves, "we always follow the rules."

2. Willa Cather wrote: "There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before." What human stories are fiercely repeating themselves in your family?

3. If your family does not seem to have stories to tell, happy or sad, funny or historical, why do you think that is the case?

4. What family stories do you tell to your children, if you have them, or other younger family members?