

Telling Our Stories

Chalice Lighting

Brief Introductions

Group Business

Reading

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.

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

Page by page, chapter by chapter the story unfolds. Day by day,
year by year, your own story unfolds, your life's story. Things
happen. People come and go. Time runs by, runs out. Maybe it is
all utterly meaningless. Maybe it is all unutterably meaningful. If
you want to know which, pay attention. Frederick Buechner

The best stories are like extended lyrical images of unchanging
human predicaments and strong, unchanging hopes and fears,
loves and hatreds.

Elizabeth Cook

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round I Share around the circle. "What are you hoping to get
from this covenant group experience?" Share one or two
sentences.

Round II Share stories using the stepping stones. Take about
eight minutes each to share.

Round III General discussion

Business

Pass out homework for next session. Look over together.

Closing Words

Song "Go Now in Peace"

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 and to come to the group one last time and say goodbye if I need to quit.
- 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.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round I Something you learned about this topic as you read and went through the exercises. The facilitator may have a specific question for all to respond to. Share one or two sentences. Go around the circle. Before Round II leave some silence.

Round II Something you felt about this topic, a way you grew, something that touched you, a story you want to share...(in other words, try to get at the more feeling-oriented material.) Go in any order. Before Round III leave some silence.

During Rounds I and II, one person speaks at a time, into an appreciative silence. The only response to the speaker is non-verbal, although the leader may express thanks if that seems comfortable. There is a brief moment of silence between speakers so that we can let the sharing "sink in." Then the next person will share. This may seem awkward at first, but most groups find it very satisfying.

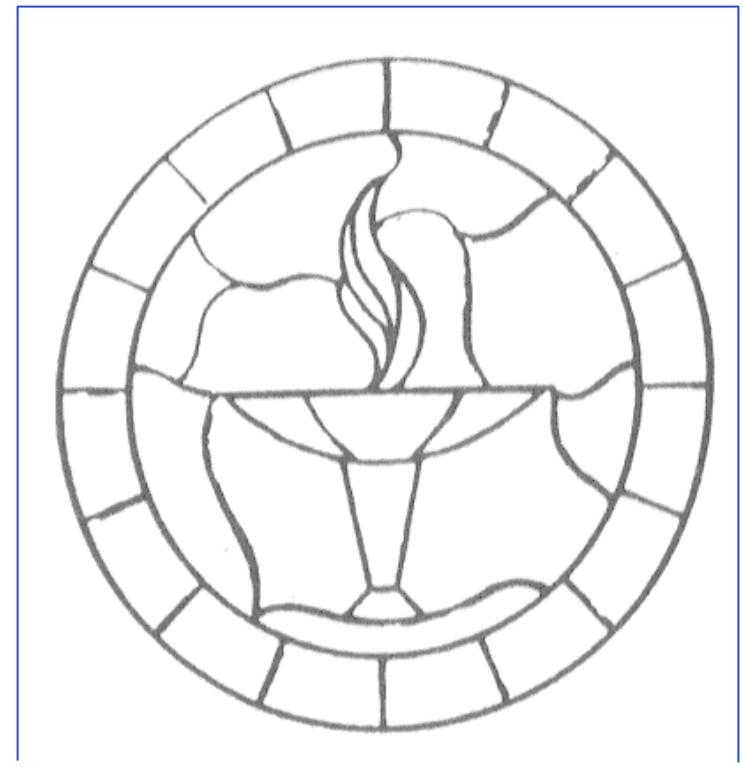
The one who is sharing has the job of speaking deeply from their heart about the topic at hand. Listeners have the task of keeping an open heart to what is shared.

The next speaker has the task of leaving some space before they speak. The leader is responsible for helping speakers remember the time frame they have to speak in. The speaking may go in any order. It is assumed that everyone in the group will speak, but if someone does not want to speak, they may pass.

Round III A more general discussion or ritual

Covenant Groups

Telling Our Stories



Leader Guide for Stepping Stones

- Put out name tags and pens.
- Put out list of members, phone and e-mail
- As people arrive ask them to check that their phone number and e-mail is correct
- Recruit three readers for the readings (in the bulletin) and one for the chalice lighting (found at the end of the leader's guide).

Approximate times to keep you on track

Chalice Lighting: (2 min)

7:00-7:15

Ask reader to light chalice and do reading (found on last page of the leader's guide).

Brief Introductions: (10 min)

Go around circle with each person saying their name and telling one thing that they hope to experience in this covenant group. Keep this short - you have lots to do tonight.

Silence: (3 min)

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

Group Business: (10 min)

7:15-7:25

Tell them how glad you are they are in the group and how much you're looking forward to getting to know them.

- Each meeting will last an hour and a half to two hours and will be centered around a certain topic. The topic for the next meeting will be given out at the end of the meeting.
- Tell them where the bathroom is.
- Usually any business is handled at the end of the meeting - and is quite brief. Today it is early in the meeting and will be longer since we're just beginning.

- Look at covenant in the bulletin. Let's read it. Ask one person to read the first item. Ask the group: Any comments or problems? Can we all agree to this? Continue through all items of the Covenant.

Reading: (5 min)

7:25-7:30

Ask your readers to read

Introduce Deep Sharing/Deep Listening: (10 min)

7:30-7:40

Tell the group about the process in your own words. They'll also be reading what's on the back of the bulletin. Tell them the deep sharing/deep listening is the core of the covenant group. It is a unique way of sharing and listening, so we'll spend a few minutes getting acquainted with this process.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening: Do your rounds of deep sharing/deep listening. Since there are lots of extras today, there may not be time for the discussion this time. Pay attention to the time allotted each person to ensure all get to share.

Omit Round 1 tonight in order to share each stepping stone as Round 2.

Round II (40 min)

7:40-8:30

Tell them: We'll take about 8 (depending on the # in your group) minutes each to share your stepping stones. If someone has come without their homework done, you can let a few people share before you to help you get an idea of what to do.

Round III

If there is time, proceed to the general discussion.

Group Business: (5 min)

8:30-8:40

Give out homework for next time. Preview homework with the group by going over it. Tell them: Read over the homework, then respond to the questions you are drawn to. There is lots of material here, it is intended to give you fertile ground for thinking about

this subject. You don't need to answer every question. You may want to respond to just one or two questions.

Ask if group members are ok with sharing the roster with one another.

Closing words: (3 min)

8:40-8:45

Invite people to hold hands around the chalice and say in a word or short phrase what you will take away with you from today's session.

Sing: (2 min) Go Now in Peace

Chalice Lighting

We come together in an attitude of openness - not knowing quite what will happen, yet daring to receive a new idea, a new experience, sustenance for our minds and our hearts.

We come with an attitude of humility, knowing how much we need one another, how alone we can be in the world, how vulnerable if we face life solely by ourselves.

We come in the spirit of love, seeking human warmth and fellowship in the hands and faces of those around us.

adapted from Peter Lee Scott

Quotes and Questions – Telling our stories

Whenever we meet and make friends, we tell our stories. We tell stories to remember who we are and what's important to us. In telling our stories, we speak of families, friends, joys, sorrows, fears, deaths, loves. With stories, we open up our lives to one another. Our stories are important **stepping stones** on our religious journeys. We tell our stories and touch our depths. By our attentive listening, we make it possible for people to say things they have never said before. Listening connects speaker and listener. Both the speaker and the listener deepen the importance of a story. Our religion is in our stories. This is the ongoing testament. The sacred texts are still being written, told, lived, as we share our stories. “Evensong”

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. Our true identity, who we are, why we are here, what sustains us, is in this story. In telling stories, we are telling each other the human story. Rachel Remen, adapted

Stories also reveal the powers that provide orientation in people's lives. 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 mundane stories in something deeper. This depth dimension of stories is crucial, for without it lives would seem empty, meaningless. Carol Christ

Your story is your own; no one can tell you how to present it. Still, since it has been done before, we can suggest some guidelines which might help you in creating the stepping stones (see next page) of your life story.

- All life is meeting others. There may be someone who had an impact on our religious feelings/ideas
 - Experiences shape our religious faith. Religious/spiritual experiences of our lives are formative in shaping who we are.
 - Living in communities, our religious community may have a lasting influence on our development
 - We are choosing creatures. Decisions can change who we are.
 - Life is made of joy and sorrow, there are peaks and valleys in our lives.
- Adapted from David Robins



Tell your story in pebbles – identifying major stepping stones of your life.

Pick five or six major events that helped shape your life, major life transitions - times that were turning points and formative to the person you are today. Focus especially on stories and events that have influenced your spiritual journey, your religious journey. We will be using these “stepping stones” as a way of introducing ourselves and getting to know each other. Share only that with which you are comfortable. For instance a “stepping stone” might be the story of a serious illness you had and some of the results of that experience, or the birth of a child, redefining your concept of God, making a difficult decision, the death of your parents, having a religious/spiritual experience...

You may want to bring 5 or 6 stones to use as you share the stories/events or you may want to list the 5 or 6 events on this sheet of paper.

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



Telling Our Stories 2

Chalice Lighting

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Silence

Readings

There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before.
Willa Cather

The writer Jorge Borges says we die twice. The first time is when our body dies and is no longer present. But the second and final death comes, he says, only when there is no one left to tell our story.

You make your life and it becomes a myth. What my journals are about is a way of life. That's what they're really about. That's what people fasten onto. It is a way of life which is really the sacramentalization of the ordinary.
May Sarton

I want to unfold.
Let no place in me hold itself closed,
for where I am closed, I am false.
I want to stay clear in your sight.

Ranier Maria Rilke

Each time I told my story, I lost a bit, the smallest drop of pain.
The Lovely Bones, Alice Sebold

There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you.
Zora Neale Hurston

The tendency of fairy tales is to transform everything internal into something external.
Max Luthi

If women's stories are not told, the depth of women's souls will not be known.
Carol Christ

It was by speaking God's creative word into the primordial darkness that God on the first day brought forth light, and it is by speaking and listening to each other that out of the darkness of our separate mysteries is brought to light the truth of who we are.

Frederick Buechner

The first and most essential service of a mythology is this one, of opening the mind and heart to the utter wonder of being.

Joseph Campbell

The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.

Muriel Rukeyser

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round I Share around the circle. Many of our beliefs change as we move through life. Share one thing you believe now in a sentence or two. You might say I believe in a loving creator. Or... I believe that in the end, if I have a loving heart, I am living to the fullest.

Round II Half the group will share their stories using the stepping stones. Take about eight minutes to share.

Round III General discussion

Business

Pass out homework. Look over together.

Closing Ritual with Stones

Song "Go Now in Peace"

Covenant Groups

Telling Our Stories 2

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 and to come to the group one last time and say goodbye if I need to quit.
- 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 Guide for Telling Our Stories 2

- Bring some extra stone for use in the closing ritual.
- Put out name tags and pens.
- Put out rosters if you are distributing them to the group
- Ask someone to read the chalice lighting (found at end of leader's guide)

Chalice Lighting – (2 minutes)

7:00-7:20

Ask reader to light chalice and read the reading found at the end of the leaders guide.

Sharing of Joys and Concerns: (15 minutes)

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

Silence: (3 minutes)

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

Reading: (5 minutes)

7:20-7:25

Do the readings around the circle, each person reading one.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening: Do your rounds of deep sharing / deep listening. Remind the group that during Rounds I and II, there is no cross talk. The speaker's job in this round is to speak from their hearts. The listener's job is to keep an open heart for what is shared. Anyone may pass who wants to.

Round I (10 minutes)

7:25-7:35

Tell them...Many of our beliefs change as we move through life. Sometimes it is easier to say what we don't believe in than to say what we do believe in. Share one thing you believe now in a sentence or two. You might say I believe in a loving creator. Or... I believe that in the end, if I have a loving heart, I am living to the fullest. Take a minute to think. Share around the circle. You may want to go first to model.

Round II (40 minutes)

7:35-8:15

The second half of the group will share their stepping stones. Each person has about 8 minutes. If someone has come without their homework done, suggest that they share in this way, "If I had made the stepping stones, they might have included the time I lost my job...OR when my daughter was born...etc.

Round III

If there is time, proceed to the discussion portion.

Group Business: (5 minutes) 8:15-8:20

Pass out the Q & Q (homework) for next time. Preview it with the group. Tell them: Read over the homework, then respond to the questions you are drawn to. There is lots of material here. It is intended to give you fertile ground for thinking about this subject. You don't need to answer every question. You may want to respond to just one or two questions.

Closing Stone Ritual: (10 minutes) 8:20-8:30

Read:

Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh invented the word "interbeing" to describe sacred time. In every human experience, you cannot just *be* by yourself alone. You have to inter-be, to be in relationship with others or other things. Covenant groups are concentrated experiences of inter-being. We each bring our separate lives to create a life together. (Adapted from Rev. Thandeka)

Say...We're going to symbolize how we as individuals come together to form our group. One at a time, put your stone on the saucer with the candle and read one of the readings from the bulletin OR you may want to create a sentence on what it means to be part of this group. Give them a minute to think. You may want to model this by going first by saying something like....My story becomes the group story.....or... Being connected with you all can become a rich part of my life.

(***When you get home, glue the stones around the candle. You can use this each session. If you put glue on top of the stones too, it will make them shiny.)

Sing Go Now in Peace: (2 minutes) 8:30-8:35

Chalice Lighting –

After you light the chalice, read:

We gather this hour as people of faith
With joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.

We light this beacon of hope, sign of our quest
For truth and meaning,
In celebration of the life we share together.

Christine Robinson

Telling Our Stories 2 Quotes and Questions

1. Bring a stone to the next session. It should be about the size of your thumbnail or a cherry tomato. We'll use it in a closing ritual.

2. Many of our beliefs change as we move through life. Sometimes it is easier to say what we don't believe in than to say what we do believe in. What are some things you believe now? It may be a religious belief, a belief about how to live our lives, about human nature, etc.

We believe that religious wisdom is ever changing. Human understanding of life and death, the world and its mysteries, is never final

Marta Flanagan, UUA.org

Universalists are often asked to tell where they stand. The only true answer to give to this question is that we do not stand at all, we move.

Lewis B Fisher

"Our best searching will only give us indications of that truth which is infinite. Yet this is no reason why we should not be looking for it, and stating it when we think we have found it.

John G. Adams

"When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things." I Cor. 13:11

As a young child I thought of God as a magical, all-powerful being... Later in childhood I began to feel I had a cause-and-effect relationship to God by how I prayed, petitioned, and behaved. Then in my teenage years God became personalized as the ideal parent, unconditionally accepting and loving... In my twenties, God had become an impersonal force or energy in the universe... Yet, in my fifties I've also begun to pray to God as a person again, especially in times of great need and great joy. I do that even as I know God intellectually as an impersonal life force. So I live in paradox and ambiguity with God now.

Rev. Scotty McLennan

What are some of the beliefs you have now? They may be religious, about your life, about human nature, etc.

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