



FAITH STORYTELLING

Toolkit

A USER'S GUIDE



Christian Reformed Church
**Faith Formation
Ministries**

crcna.org/FaithFormation

A close-up photograph of a dining table. In the center, a pair of hands holds a small, square, vintage black and white photograph with scalloped edges. The photo depicts a group of people, possibly a family, in a candid moment. The background is softly blurred, showing a white plate, a glass of orange juice, and silverware on a patterned tablecloth. The lighting is warm and intimate, suggesting an evening meal.

**“ TELL AND LISTEN
AS IF YOUR LIFE
DEPENDS ON IT.”**

—JOAN DIDION



Welcome to the user's guide for the Faith Storytelling toolkit—an online resource designed to help your congregation develop a storytelling culture in which sharing faith stories becomes a deep, rich, natural pathway to growing together in Christ.

You can access this toolkit and others at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

In this toolkit you'll find ideas for how to shape and share faith stories in many different areas of church life:

- * worship
- * church education
- * youth groups
- * intergenerational groups
- * fellowship
- * outreach ministries
- * families

How to Use Our Toolkits

This toolkit, like others designed by the Faith Formation Ministries team, was created in collaboration *with* CRC church leaders *for* CRC church leaders.

With your particular needs in mind, we've done the work of gathering great resources on a variety of faith formation issues into online locations organized by topic. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits to see what's available or in development.

Our toolkit resources are gathered from real-life church practices, from online sources, and from published materials. We've tried to glean and share the best of the best, and we'll add other great new resources as we discover them, so check back often!



Bookmark our toolkit page for easy reference:
crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits

THREE MINUTES OF GRACE

BY SYD HIELEMA

The 60ish professor

settled himself in front of the microphone, opened his Bible, and announced, “Psalm 13, a psalm of David:”

How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Look on me and answer, LORD my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the LORD’s praise,
for he has been good to me.

The professor closed the Bible, took a deep breath, looked over the congregation, and said, “This psalm is my life story.”

“I have struggled with depression for the past twenty-five years,” he continued. “It comes and goes with greater and lesser intensity.

Syd Hielema is team leader of Faith Formation Ministries and a member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC, Ancaster, Ontario.



“At the moment I feel quite strong. But there have been many deep valleys along the way.

“David’s opening phrase, ‘How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?’ whispers in my heart every day in some form. But I know I need to travel with him to the end of the psalm as he declares, ‘But I trust in your unfailing love. . . . I will sing the LORD’s praise, for he has been good to me.’ This psalm—and others like it—are my lifeline.”

The professor was taking his turn sharing in “This Month’s Psalm,” a testimony time during our morning worship in which anyone could offer to read a psalm (or an excerpt) and describe how the reading had significantly shaped his or her life.

Those three-minute sharing times ripple out to change the way we are a community together. All of us who are gathered for worship—from the 5-year-old to the 95-year-old—realize in a deeper way that we are all redeemed sinners, loved by Jesus, shaped by grace, struggling with our own “thorns in the flesh,” longing for wholeness. We all stand together at the cross with open hands.

He closed the Bible, took a deep breath, looked over the congregation, and said, “This psalm is my life story.”

Can you imagine how powerful three minutes of faith storytelling might be in your congregation?

To learn more, visit the Faith Storytelling toolkit online at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

WHY TELLING OUR STORIES MATTERS

BY CHUCK DEGROAT

This article is adapted with permission from a blog post by Chuck DeGroat (chuckdegroat.net). Chuck is associate professor of pastoral care and counseling at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and is a senior fellow at Newbigin House of Studies.

1

We Are Hardwired for Story

Curt Thompson writes, “The process of reflecting on and telling others your story, and the way you experience others hearing it, actually shapes the story and the very neural correlates, or networks, it represents.” In other words, we thrive when we listen and tell. Without it, we settle for a life of reactivity, not reflection. Simply put, story is healthy.

2

We Are Meaning-Makers

For millennia, telling and listening to stories was the fundamental building block of civilization, the way of passing along tradition and family tales and myths. Today, our meaning-making happens in radically different and often compartmentalized ways: seeing a therapist, connecting with an old friend on Facebook, attending church. Busyness has robbed us of time. Individualism has robbed us of community rituals. Consumerism has redefined our purpose. Story can set it straight.

3

We Are Honest

Storytelling requires honesty. I have told my own story in highly edited ways, often trying to cast myself in the best possible light. Eventually, the truth will get you. The point is that there is no shame in telling the truth. The shame is in the radical editing for the sake of glossing over the hard times, the failures, the suffering, and the errors.

4

We Are Wounded

Telling our stories heals us. After the Rwandan genocide, there were many therapists who visited Rwanda with new techniques for healing—quick fixes for the damaged and abused human soul. What did psychologists and theologians eventually find? No new techniques seemed to help. But old-fashioned, group storytelling seemed to heal wounds. As Rwandan men and women sat together and told their stories, healing and forgiveness took place.

5

We Are Storied Beings

The Judeo-Christian religion is storied. We are not gnostics. We believe in actual events, real and felt. Devoted Christians ought to be the most storied of all—rooted in narrative, God's and ours—mindful of the need to remember.

6

We Are Liturgical

In historic Christian worship, we come together to rehearse the Great Story. In confession and assurance, in the sermon and the eucharist, in the Lord's Prayer and the benediction, the whole story is told—the story of original goodness invaded by sin, the story of dignity and depravity, of hunger and thirst, of blessing and mission. Worship, at its best, is NOT a praise-song-feel-good-love-fest but an intentional engagement with God as his loving, desiring, obeying, hoping creatures, longing to be re-storied and rebranded in the Great Story told each week.

7

We Are Commanded

Again and again in Scripture, God's rescued people are told to remember. The Israelites are commanded to remember the great rescue from Egypt. The exiles are told to remember God's faithfulness. Christians are given the eucharistic meal and commanded to repeat it regularly in remembrance of Jesus. It seems that telling and listening produce a kind of corporate remembering for Christians in worship. The unhurried process of telling and listening invites us into a kind of sacred cadence, a rhythm that can reform our hearts and even rewire our brains.

10 EASY WAYS TO SHARE FAITH STORIES IN YOUR CONGREGATION

- 1** Begin gatherings (Sunday school, council meetings, youth group, small groups, etc.) with the question “Where did you see God this week?”
- 2** Plan an intergenerational storytelling dinner to which everyone brings a faith story to share.
- 3** Plan evening or summer services that focus on sharing faith stories.
- 4** Encourage parents to give a brief testimony before the baptism of their child.
- 5** Set aside time in worship for a three-minute testimony each month.
- 6** Plan a “writing your story” session for those who will be making profession of faith.
- 7** Offer an adult education series devoted to telling faith stories.
- 8** Form a “Storytelling Team” of writers, videographers, artists, and other creative people.
- 9** Ask a writer in your congregation to offer a workshop on crafting a compelling faith story.
- 10** Interview people in your church’s neighborhood, and share their stories with your congregation.

Learn More in Our Online Faith Storytelling Toolkit

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For more information on how to incorporate faith storytelling in your church, contact one of Faith Formation Ministries’ Regional Catalyzers (crcna.org/FaithFormation/Coaching).



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