

Sharing Faith Stories in Groups

A Guide for Participants

The Process

Gathering in small, diverse groups to listen and to speak about this holy topic has been a characteristic practice of the Global Christian Forum from its beginning.

In early days of the Forum, making space for faith stories was a way to extend a welcoming hand to all participants. While Christians do not all delight in theological discussions or worship in the same ways, all Christians journey with Jesus Christ. Everyone has a story to tell. Together, these narratives bear witness to the astonishing range of God's ways of working with us. As our own stories join the others in the group, we can see them, and our communities, with fresh eyes.

As this practice embraces the story of every *person*, it also honors the graceful variety of the formative *communities* to which participants belong. While the journeys are as distinct as the persons around the circle, they bear witness also to the roles of the diverse communities of practices and praise in which we live.

In reflecting on the experience of sharing faith stories, the Forum has said that they invite us to hear the Spirit in new ways and leads us back to the continuing guidance of the Word of God.¹

Groups can include up to 15 other people, who are diverse in their church memberships and traditions, in age and gender, in country and region, and in other ways. If different languages are spoken, translation help will be needed.

Preparing for the sessions to "tell the stories of our journeys with Jesus Christ"

In the group, each person is asked to speak for about 7 minutes. It is not expected that you would plan in advance every word you would say. But, if your life permits, you can give some prayerful thought to how you will tell your story.

For some, testimonies are a regular part of your Christian life; others may find this assignment more unfamiliar and perhaps even a bit intimidating.

No matter how many times you have related your faith story before, you are invited here not simply to repeat what you might have said in other contexts but to respond to this specific moment: at this time, with these people, with this purpose, you will join your story to the others in your group.

Remember that these stories are your stories – but since they are about your relation with Christ, their purpose is also – it is first! – to give praise to Christ, our common Lord. Thus, they serve the purpose of the session: through these stories, **“to recognize one another in Christ and Christ in one another.”**

Telling your Faith Story

Please plan to speak for **no more than 7 minutes**. In your group, a facilitator can provide a simple way for you to know when you have about one minute remaining.

Begin with a very brief introduction – no more than a sentence or two:

- your name and home country;
- your church family and (if applicable to you) your current work.

Then speak about a few aspects of your story – not the entire story, but a few selected incidents or aspects, shaped for the purposes of the gathering.

- This is not an introduction to your entire life; the time is too brief and too focused. And it is not a resume or *curriculum vitae*, with a focus primarily on professional positions or accomplishments.
- That means you need a clear idea of what focus – what few incidents or themes you want to shape your faith story. This could be how you came to faith, how faith shaped your journey at a crucial point, perhaps a point of clarity or of struggle; or a specific story of encounter with Christ in recent life.
- It is helpful to think also how you would speak not only of you “in yourself” in relation to Jesus Christ but also about you in your community of faith.

In any case, be assured that you can speak in your own “language of faith,” the words and ways of speaking most congenial to you. Listening to the range of these styles is one of the gifts of ecumenical work.

Listening to the stories of others

Expect the Holy Spirit to be at work both as you speak and as you listen. **Listening is as important**

as speaking!

- Ask God to open your eyes and ears, your mind and your heart.
- Seek to contribute to an atmosphere of respectful listening and a spirit that allows for humor and gentle laughter.
- As each person speaks, ask yourself: How do I see here encounter with Christ? How do I hear in these words the living Word of God at work among God's people?
- There may be members of the group whose Christian experience is much different from your own. There may be people from Christian traditions or communities with which you are unfamiliar, or about which you are even a bit wary. Be especially attentive to these stories: How can you here be "discovering our shared relationship to our Lord Jesus"?

As you listen, you might have questions, because you come from different cultures and church traditions. Faith sharing is not meant to become a discussion. The rest of the Gathering will give you opportunities to approach a speaker, perhaps during one of the breaks, and continue a conversation.

After the sessions:

Give thanks for the stories you have heard, especially for the places where you were surprised or challenged.

- Pray for each of your group members.
- Reflect on how your own perspective on your story may have changed by its interaction with the other stories of your group.