

History-Sharing and Understanding

History is a vision of God's creation on the move.
Arnold J. Toynbee



Purpose

For participants to share their history and to gain an understanding of the history of the congregation and the diocese.

Theological understanding

Scripture tells us over and over the importance of knowing and sharing the story of being a people of faith. Through the telling of these stories we help others understand how we are connected to God and learn about the faith journeys that brought each of us where we are today. In the sharing, the work of the Holy Spirit in creating community is further revealed.

Special Instructions

This module may be used with clergy-only or mixed clergy-lay groups. It requires some pre-work on the part of the facilitator (see instructions on the next page), but the content of the session comes from the participants themselves. It is a good session for getting to know one another. Fresh Start clergy are also strongly encouraged to do a similar session with their new congregations with the help of an outside facilitator (see the two versions of "Fresh Start in Your Congregation: A Resource;" one or both could be given to participants at the end of your session).

Related Modules

Habits, Norms and Expectations
Role Clarity
Transition

Prior to Session

Using a large roll of butcher paper at least 2' wide (available at office supply or art stores):

- Cut three equal lengths of paper, each a minimum of 9' and up to 24' long.
- On each length of paper, draw a line lengthwise across the middle, creating a timeline that covers the lifetime of the diocese from its founding. On each of the three timelines, put the founding date at the far left and the current year at the far right.
- Divide the timelines into two segments, using most of the length for the last 50 years. Mark the decades for the last 50 years and provide some dates along the timeline for the earlier years. Each timeline should look something like the following with the dates spaced in the same way on each.



- Label one timeline “Diocesan History” and note a few key events in the life of the diocese (e.g., when established, tenures of bishops) – space out the events appropriately on the timeline and include the year that each happened. Leave mostly blank, however, to be filled in by participants.
- Label one of the remaining timelines “Personal History” and the third, “World History.” Note you may also want to add a fourth timeline to cover the history of the area (region or state) covered by your diocese or to make a separate US History line. If you do so, be sure and create a handout with questions related to that timeline.
- If you wish you may add some key dates to the timelines as well, but leave them mostly blank to be filled in by participants.
- In the meeting room, post each of the timelines on different walls with the diocesan one at the front of the room. If you do not have sufficient wall space use sheets of foam board taped together and either placed across several easels or made into a stand-up “wall” (six sheets will create a 24’x8’ wall – tape them accordion style with the tape on alternating sides so you can fold them up and reuse them – the timelines can be attached to the foam board with push pins or masking tape).

- If the group is small, you can put all timelines on one sheet of paper. The point is to have sufficient space around the timelines for each person to be able to reach them easily to add to them.

You can find timelines on the web with important US, Anglican Church and world history dates.

- For general history timelines, check www.factmonster.com/spot/timelinearchive.html.
- There is a very generic world timeline at www.timelineindex.com.
- Although designed for individuals, you can enter a beginning and ending date covering a span of up to 140 years at www.ourtimelines.com and get a timeline with events (mostly from the US) and key historical figures that would track with each year of your diocese's life.
- For Anglican Church dates up to 1998, go to <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/timeline>.
- For dates relative to your diocese, look for a local history book or historical information posted on the diocesan website.

If you are unfamiliar with the diocese and its history, invite someone who is to come to the Fresh Start session to share stories about diocesan history.

At the Session

Post the timelines where people can add to them. (Be sure you have markers that will not bleed through the paper!) As people enter, ask them to put their name on the diocesan timeline by the date when they entered the diocese (and for clergy, when they began their new position, if that is different). Arrange chairs so that people can see the diocesan timeline.

General Outline of Session

1. Opening meditation or worship (suggested readings – Genesis 50:22-26 and Exodus 13:17-19).
2. Check-in
3. Have participants spend several minutes individually writing down key events or milestones in their personal histories, the diocese, and the world* and then write them on the appropriate timeline with markers (so they can be seen) – Handout 1.
4. Divide into three* small groups, one for each of the timelines, to discuss the stories that each of the timelines tell – Handouts 2, 3, 4.
5. Sharing of timeline stories with whole group and general discussion of the patterns among them.
6. History of the diocese (optional): presentation by someone knowledgeable about diocesan history from the founding of the first congregation (which may be considerably earlier than the diocese itself) to the present, noting particularly the key “highs” and “lows” and making connections to what has been said during the session already.
7. Individual reflection on the history (as they know it) of the congregations represented and posting of key events/milestones on diocesan timeline – Handout 5.
8. Reflection in small or large group (as appropriate) on congregational histories and how they relate to the personal, diocesan, and world timelines – Handout 6.
9. Wrap up and closing prayer

*If you add a timeline, be sure to ask them to fill in events on it as well and then divide into four small groups (one for each timeline) using the extra handout you created.

Note: This approach draws heavily on history-sharing as outlined by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff in Future Search: An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations & Communities. However, there are many ways of conducting a history-sharing. See the bibliography for resources on other methodologies.

Bibliography

Ammerman, Nancy T., Carroll, Jackson W.; Dudley, Carl S.; and McKinney, William, eds., Studying Congregations: A New Handbook, Nashville, TN; Abingdon Press, 1998 – provides extensive resources on how to study congregations, including ways to learn about their histories.

Dudley, Carl S., and Ammerman, Nancy T.; Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, & Adapting in Changing Communities; New York, NY; Jossey-Bass, 2002 – includes extensive discussion of congregational history-sharing and context of events outside congregation.

Nicholson, Roger S., ed., Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry; Herndon, VA; The Alban Institute, 1998 – Chapter 6 deals with the importance of learning a congregation's history, including some reflection and discussion questions (see pp. 65 – 74).

Oswald, Roy M.; Heath, James M.; and Heath, Ann W., eds.; Beginning New Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions; Herndon, VA; The Alban Institute, 2003 – includes an alternate approach to history-sharing with a new rector (see pp. 64-65).

Oswald, Roy M.; New Beginnings: A Pastorate Start Up Workbook; Herndon, VA; The Alban Institute, 1989 – includes an alternate approach to doing the history-sharing (see pp. 30 – 33).

Rendle, Gilbert R.; and Mann, Alice, Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations; Herndon, VA; The Alban Institute, 2003 – includes an alternate approach to history-sharing (see pp. 127-128, 262 – 268).

Weisbord, Marvin; and Janoff, Sandra; Future Search: An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations & Communities, 2nd Edition; San Francisco, CA; Berrett-Koehler, 2000 – see especially pp. 81-87, 206 for tips on doing history-sharing and pp. 155-171 for general tips on facilitation.

Other Resources

The web-based Congregational Resources Guide has a 47-page document on congregational history-sharing. “Constructing Your Congregation’s Story” by James P. Wind can be read on-line (and has a search capability) or downloaded as a PDF file. Go to www.congregationalresources.org/constructing-your-congregations-story or type the title of the article into the site’s search engine.

History-Sharing and Understanding Talking Points and *Instructions*

History is a vision of God's creation on the move.

Arnold J. Toynbee

Introduction

Our time today is to reflect on what Toynbee calls “a vision of God’s creation on the move” – our own histories, the history of this diocese, the world around us, and our congregations.

There are three timelines posted around the room. The one in front is that of this diocese with a few key dates already placed on it. The other two are labeled “Personal History” and “World History.”

Take a few minutes to think about your own life. On the handout I have just given you, draw your own life’s timeline, noting the milestones that have brought you to this place in your journey. Then think about those events in the world that have been important to you or that you feel are important to society as a whole and, if you are

Write the Toynbee quote above on a flip chart.

As participants enter, have them sign their name and the date they entered the diocese on the appropriate place on the “Diocesan History.” Ask clergy to add the date when they started their new call as well, if it is different.

***Note:** the timelines need to be set up so that people can easily get to them and add events. See the instructions in the resource section for more details.*

Distribute Handout 1.

***Note:** depending upon the makeup of the group there may not be many people who are familiar with the diocese. You have two options: if there is no one (or only one or two), you may want to give a presentation on the diocese and its history. The presentation should simply be a straight history-sharing, without a lot of*

familiar with this diocese, note milestones you remember from the diocese's history as well. Jot these down on the handout, and when you are ready write the milestones you have identified on the appropriate timeline.

Finding the Stories

Each of these timelines has a story to tell – about the experience and age of the people in this room and how their lives were impacted by events in the world, and about the mission of this diocese and how it has changed over the years to meet the changing needs of God's people. Using the questions in your handout find the story that the timeline your group has been assigned has to tell. Look at the other timelines as well – how do the stories intersect or influence each other? Be prepared to tell your story to the larger group.

commentary on the impact of world or community events. If there are several people who are familiar with the diocese, then proceed as outlined – there will be an opportunity for a fuller discussion of diocesan history later.

When everyone has posted their events on the three timelines, divide participants into three groups. Assign one group the "Personal History" timeline (Handout 2), the second group "World History" (Handout 3), and the third group "Diocesan History" (Handout 4). These groups may be as small as two, but should be no more than seven. If you need to you can assign a single timeline to more than one group. If you have fewer than five participants then ask the whole group to do each of the analyses. Reposition the timelines on one wall, directly above one another if possible with the "Diocesan History" in the middle.

After the groups have had time to develop the stories, ask them to report out starting with the "Personal History" group, then moving to "Diocesan

<p>What stories have you found in the timelines? As you listen to each story, feel free to chime in with your own observations and sense of meaning.</p> <p><u>Diocesan History (optional)</u></p> <p>I'd like to add to the history of this diocese to give you some more background on where it has been and what it carries forward from that past.</p> <p><u>History of the Congregations</u></p> <p>Now let's reflect on the history of our congregations. Using the handout I have just given you, draw a timeline for your congregation, noting special events or milestones and responding to the questions on the sheet. When you are ready, add important milestones from your congregation's history to the "Diocesan History."</p> <p>Looking at your congregation's timeline, how does its story relate to your personal timeline and to the stories of the diocese and the world that we have heard today?</p>	<p><i>History" and finally "World History." Facilitate cross-conversation and observations among the various groups as the presentations are being made.</i></p> <p><i>Fill in the history of your diocese at this point or have a guest speaker do so, adding to whatever has already been said to share your knowledge of the diocese and its role in the world.</i></p> <p><i>Distribute Handout 5.</i></p> <p><i>When everyone has posted their congregation's milestones on the timeline either:</i></p> <p><i>Break them into small groups and distribute Handout 6 OR</i></p> <p><i>Facilitate a large group discussion using the questions in Handout 6 to guide the conversation.</i></p>
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	<p><i>If you have had participants share their stories in small groups, facilitate a discussion with the whole group of what was learned in the small group discussion.</i></p> <p><i>End the session with a prayer, poem or appropriate reading.</i></p>
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History-Sharing and Understanding Handout 1

Draw your personal timeline, noting major events or milestones that have influenced you and your journey.

What major events or milestones in the world had an influence on you? Jot them down by date below.

What major events or milestones in the life of this diocese had an influence on you or are ones you feel should be noted? Jot them down by date below.

When you have answered all three questions, take your paper and enter your answers on the appropriate timeline (e.g., personal milestones on the "Personal History," diocesan on the "Diocesan History").

History – Sharing and Understanding Handout 2

The Story Told by the Personal History Timeline

Purpose

To identify and interpret the trends, themes and patterns important to us and establish a context for our life together.

As a group, use the Personal History Timeline to tell us a story about the people in this room. In crafting your story, take into account:

1. What the Personal History Timeline says about who the people in the room are;
2. How their stories have been influenced by or intersected with the events on the Diocesan and World History Timelines;
3. What their “Joseph’s bones” --memories, attitudes, beliefs, etc. that they carry with them from their past – are likely to be; and
4. What the implications are for the Diocese and its ministry.

Looking across the timelines, what patterns do you see?

Be prepared to share your story and observations with the rest of the group.

History-Sharing and Understanding Handout 3

The Story Told by the World History Timeline

Purpose

To identify and interpret the trends, themes and patterns important to us and establish a context for our life together.

As a group use the World History Timeline to tell us a story about our society as a whole. In crafting your story, take into account:

1. How these events relate to what is told on the Personal History Timeline,
2. How these events relate to what is on the Diocesan History Timeline,
3. Those things from the past that are being carried into the future (the “Joseph’s bones”), and
4. The implications of the World story for this diocese.

Looking across the timelines, what patterns do you see?

Be prepared to share your story and observations with the rest of the group.

History-Sharing and Understanding Handout 4

The Story Told by the Diocesan History Timeline

Purpose

To identify and interpret the trends, themes and patterns important to us and establish a context for our life together.

As a group use the Diocesan History Timeline to tell us a story about our diocese. In crafting your story, take into account:

1. How these events relate to what is told on the Personal History Timeline,
2. How these events relate to what is on the World History Timeline,
3. Those things from the past that the diocese is carrying forward today (its “Joseph’s bones”), and
4. The implications of the diocesan story for its ministry today.

Looking across the timelines, what patterns do you see?

Be prepared to share your story and observations with the rest of the group.

History-Sharing and Understanding Handout 5

The Story of Your Congregation

Individually, draw a timeline of your congregation's history noting key events and persons.

What are the "Joseph's bones" your congregation carries with it?

How does the story told by your congregation's timeline relate to the Diocesan History Timeline? To the World History Timeline? To your Personal History Timeline?

When you are done, post your congregation's key milestones on the Diocesan Timeline and be prepared to share your observations with the group.

History-Sharing and Understanding Handout 6

Reflecting on Your Congregation

In your small group:

Share your congregation's timeline telling what you know about its founding era, its "glory days," and any major defining events (e.g., a devastating fire, dedication of a new building).

What are "Joseph's bones" for your congregation – that from their past which they want to carry into the future?

How does the story told by your congregation's timeline relate to that of the Diocesan History Timeline? The World History Timeline?

What is the impact of this history on your congregation's ministry?