



A Community of Stories

Greenville UU Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Covenant Group Session Plan

Adapted by Jennifer Lathrop, March 2019, updated February 2025

Pre-Work: Where I'm From Writing. Use the template provided at the end of this handout, create your own "Where I'm From" Poem. If you wish, share this with the group, during Sharing.

Welcome, Chalice Lighting: Let our sharing together provide a place where memories are rooted, where mysteries are pondered, where dreams are nourished, where love is freely given, where failures are owned and accepted, where sorrows are transformed, where our lives are deepened, challenged and uplifted and where we can share the gift of laughter. Let this be such a time and place. ~Adapted from Rev. David E. Bumbaugh

Check In: Share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

Opening Reading:

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. The stories at every kitchen table are about the same things, stories of owning, having and losing, stories of sex, of power, of pain, of wounding, of courage, hope and healing, of loneliness and the end of loneliness. Stories about God. In telling them, we are telling each other the human story.

~ Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. What stories did your "elders" pass down to you? How have they influenced your life and how you see your role?
2. When has re-telling or re-writing of your story healed or saved you?
3. What current cultural "story" strikes you as dangerous? How might you step up your commitment and efforts to challenge that dangerously false story?
4. How do you use story in your life?
5. Where have you heard only a single story about a person, country, or group? What beliefs did this inspire and how can you expand the stories you hear?
6. What is a story from childhood that guided you? Has its influence remained in your life?
7. Have you experienced a 'plot twist' in your own life?

Readings

There are no true stories; we are making up every one of them. ~ Pema Chodron

There are only true stories. We are discovering the truth in them. ~ Christina Baldwin

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. ~ Maya Angelou

Listening is soul work. It can help the living find the meaning to go on in the midst of trying circumstances, and it can help the dying accept the brevity of their lives. Without listening, there can be no story. And without stories, we cannot complete the unfinished work of healing. ~ Richard Stone, *The Healing Art of Storytelling*

Show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become... Power is the ability to not only tell the story of another person but make it the definitive story of that person.

~ Chimamanda Adichie, *Video: The Danger of a Single Story*

The truth about stories is that that is all we are. ~ Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*

Those who tell the stories, rule the world. ~ Hopi Proverb

If you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story, and to start with, “secondly”.

~Mourid Barghouti

Storytelling is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the way things are is not permanent, not universal, and not necessary... We will not know our own injustice if we cannot imagine justice. We will not be free if we do not imagine freedom. We cannot demand that anyone try to attain justice and freedom who has not had a chance to imagine them as attainable. ~ Ursula K. Le Guin

Sharing

This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share responses to one or more of the session questions or the readings. Share your “Where I’m From poem”, if you wish.

This is usually a good time to take a brief break

Discussion

This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

Check out: As we close today, what do you want to be a part of your story this week?

Closing reading:

Research consistently shows that stories mold us. The more deeply we are cast under a story’s spell, the more potent its influence. In fact, fiction seems to be more effective at changing beliefs than nonfiction, which is designed to persuade through argument and evidence. Studies show that when we read nonfiction, we read with our shields up. We are critical and skeptical. But when we are absorbed in a story, we drop our intellectual guard. We are moved emotionally, and this seems to make us open to seeing each other and life anew.

~ David Zahl

Announcements/Plans

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Where I'm From Template:

I am from _____ (specific ordinary item)

From _____ and _____ (product names).

I am from the _____ (description of your home)

_____ (a detail about your home – a smell, taste, or feel)

I am from the _____ (plant, flower, nature item)

The _____ (plant or tree)

Whose _____ (description of the above) I remember as if they were my own.

I'm from _____ and _____ (a family tradition and family trait)

From _____ and _____ (names of family members)

I'm from _____ and _____ (family habits)

And from _____ (family habit)

I'm from _____ and _____ (things you were told as a child)

And _____ (a song or saying you heard as a child)

I'm from _____ (a family tradition/religious tradition)

I'm from _____ (place of birth) and _____ (family ancestry or nationality)

_____ and _____ (family foods)

From _____ (a story about a family member)

_____ (detail about the story or person)

_____ (description of family mementos, pictures, or treasures)

_____ (location of mementos)

I am from those moments _____ (how you feel).

Where I'm From By George Ella Lyon

<http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening, it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush
the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember as if they were my
own.
I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons,

from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb and ten verses I can say myself.
I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger,
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.
Under my bed was a dress box spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments-- snapped before I budded --
leaf-fall from the family tree.