



Engaging the Community:

The Power of the Story



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The Power of the Story

'Stories on the Street' is so named because of the power of the story, both in Jesus' ministry and also in ours. It is hearing each other's stories that can bring people together, and sometimes with powerful effect. There is no more powerful witness to others than telling the story of God at work in our own lives. In addition, stories can be powerful in other areas, such as raising awareness, in providing healing, and in encouraging people to take action over a certain issue.

In America, the Hearth Project was started by Marc Yaconelli on Valentine's day 2010. It is a new model of community building based on personal storytelling, reflective listening, and community service. The Hearth develops community gatherings in which people explore, craft, and share stories from their life experience. This method has been particularly effective, not just in building community, but in assisting communities in healing from trauma, deepening awareness around racial and social conflicts, and mobilising local people to address environmental injustice.

For more information on the Hearth Project, go to the following two websites.

<https://www.greenbelt.org.uk/talks/the-power-of-personal-storytelling/>

<https://markyaconelli.wordpress.com/storytelling/>

In the spirit of the Hearth project, consider organising an evening of story-telling. You could use the following steps:

1. Find a venue. This could be a local pub, if the landlord is on board, or it could be in a home or a room in a community centre. In the summer it could be in a garden around a firepit or in a local park.

Choose a theme. Invite local people to come to this evening to tell their stories on this theme.

Some ideas for themes could be:
Love hurts, Letting go, Loneliness, Border crossings, Bravery, Kindness of strangers, Survival, Down and out, Tales of wonder, Out of the ashes.

2. Arrange for food to be served and if not in a pub, ask people to bring something to drink. To provide a break from the story-telling, you could ask a local musician/s to come and play some music during the intervals, depending on the size of the venue.

Ask for a contribution from those taking part and stating that any profits will go to a charity that has some link to the theme of the story telling evening.



Alternatives

If you like you could add an element of art or drama. Ask people to bring in a picture that helps with the telling of the story, or if you have an artist in your church he or she could draw the story as it is being told.

Or you could set the scene by performing a drama based on the theme. You may want to start the evening with a biblical monologue or sketch that is in keeping with the theme of the evening, but you will be the best judge as to whether that is appropriate. It is good to note that some monologues in *Stories on the Street* have been performed with a non-churched audience and have had a powerful response in terms of discussion and sharing.

Below are some tips for how to construct a story. They are just there as guidelines. It is not necessary for participants to keep to this structure.

How to Craft a Story

Title:

Our experiences are complex, stories tend to be simple. What is the title of the story you want to tell? Giving it a title will help you get to the heart of your story. For example: "How I learned to forgive my mother."

Setting:

Give a few introductory details, only what is necessary: place, time, age, others involved and your relationship to them. This gives your story a context, a setting and characters.

Character:

We need to have a feeling for the "who" of the story. A few descriptive words about appearance and personality (short, rough hands, a chipped front tooth, quiet, never made eye contact, loved dogs). Avoid superlatives ("the most amazing!"). What was the longing or deep fear that you carried? (helps us get to the heart of the person)—"I longed to move away from home." "I was terrified of becoming my father." In an honest way, give us something vulnerable about the main character....vulnerability is the door that allows the audience to connect—"I lost my mother when I was 5, and I think I wanted every female teacher I had to be my mother."

Action:

In a story something happens. Stories have a beginning, middle and an end. There's a conflict, a climax, and a resolution. Try to focus on one interaction, one moment that changed you. Get into the action as soon as possible.

See it:

Like good writing "show, don't tell." In other words, visualise the scenes of your story and then describe these scenes without lots of background and explanations: Don't give us your thoughts on the justice system, give us the smell, the colours, the sounds.

It might help to create an internal story board – divide your story into scenes to help you structure and remember it.

Start and Finish:

Good stories have a start and finish that grab the attention. Know your opening line, otherwise you'll wander: Make sure the last line helps us know what the story means to you: "I still don't know what happens after we die, but every time I hear that song I see her face, and I hear her singing, and it makes me smile."

Summary:

Remember these are just some tips - there is no right way to tell your story. Everyone has a different style. Talk in a way that's natural to who you are. Begin it, follow it through the action, end it and tell what it all means. Remember colour, beauty, feelings, and touch. Don't talk about it, tell it. Live through it again.