

Effective Storytelling

Stories are often the best way to capture and convey the power of deep truths and significant relationships. Consider how people are enamored when someone tells the story of meeting and falling in love with his or her spouse or recalls the birth of his or her first child.

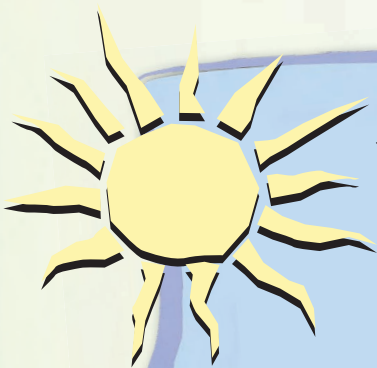
As Catholics we are storytellers at heart. We retell the stories of faith passed from one generation to the next through the Scriptures and personal life experiences. Our stories of faith express the deep love relationship we have with God.

Jesus himself is the Story of God, the Word of God proclaimed most fully. We believers have our own stories of faith to tell as well; we too are words of God. When we share our faith with young people, we hope they will also become truly fascinated with Jesus.

If we want our sessions to come alive with genuine passion and enthusiasm, we must tell stories—stories of our own faith encounters with God, stories of how we have learned what it means to be a follower of Jesus, stories of our experiences with other people of faith. We will tell stories that are funny, sad, poignant, even occasionally embarrassing. And when we tell these stories with honesty and enthusiasm, the spiritual imagination is ignited!

In hearing stories, young people will discover that they too have wonderful stories to share. And each time a story of faith is told, the Good News is proclaimed once again.

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Hints for Sharing Your Stories

The following suggestions are intended to help you tell stories about your experiences during faith formation sessions:

- Make sure your story has a clear lesson and purpose. When selecting a life story, ask yourself what you have personally experienced that relates to the point you wish to convey.
- Make sure your story fits in with the rest of the session plan. If it is presented out of context, it will lose its effect.
- Give your story time to develop. Details are vital and can bring the story to life! Include descriptions of the atmosphere, location, and people involved. But do not drag the story out too much; this may cause it to lose its effectiveness.
- Let the tone of your story fit the purpose of the session. Tell it in a way that creates an atmosphere that enhances the learning. For example, avoid telling a humorous story right before prayer.
- Always make explicit the feeling level of your story. Good stories touch the heart, not just the head. But remember that young adolescents are emotionally vulnerable; take care not to manipulate their feelings.
- Be authentic. Young people will detect and reject phoniness immediately.
- Practice your story! Usually if a good story does not go over well, it simply needs better telling. Try different approaches, expressions, or punch lines. A good story deserves to be told well.
- At the conclusion of the story, clearly state the lesson to be learned. Do not presume the participants will get the point without explanation.
- Stories should be personal, but this does not mean you should pour out your deepest secrets to the young people. To assure appropriate boundaries of self-disclosure, first tell your story to a friend and ask for feedback.