



Living Our Faith Stories: Building and strengthening our pastoral relationships

I. Getting Started

A resource of:

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INTRODUCTION

Toronto Conference has been piloting a program (Effective Leadership) whose goal is to support communities of faith and ministry personnel to create a pastoral relationship that is a good fit. The eight ministry categories allow both ministry personnel and communities of faith to be very clear about their strengths and passions and sense of direction. In the past five years, Toronto Southeast Presbytery has been working at creating processes and resources to support this work. One of the resources was the offer of companions/consultants trained to walk with congregations as they articulate their vision.

For those familiar with the Ministry Articulation Process (MAP) there will be a similar process beginning in 2019 after the structural changes to the courts take effect. The program will be called Living Our Faith Stories and will serve a similar purpose to the MAP. The categories will differ and the formats for storytelling will vary but the essential objective - being clear about who we are as we build and strengthen our pastoral relationship - is the same.

Over our years with MAP we have learned a few things:

1. Getting to know ourselves, and our context and being clear about our intentions and turning that into a plan is essential for communities of faith.
2. It is helpful in setting a new direction. It is helpful in a search process. It is helpful in articulating an action plan that goes from hopes and dreams to task assignments.
3. It is only helpful if enough members own it and only if it is reviewed regularly.
4. The process helps people have conversations they might not normally have.
5. That getting external assistance to assist with that is very helpful.
6. It does facilitate a better fit.

RESOURCES

This resource kit includes 6 sections to help your congregation or pastoral charge get the most out of the living our faith stories process. They are:

- I. Getting Started, which will help you set the table for good conversations about your congregation's current and future goals.
- II. Prayer and Reflection Resources, which will provide ways for your steering team and congregation to be attentive to the "why" of our ministry and mission. As we discern our church's future, we open ourselves to the work of the Spirit among us and listen for God's call.
- III. The Context for our Ministries, which encourages you to assess how well you know your neighbours and provides guidance for refreshing your understanding of your location as you prepare to set goals for your ministry and mission.
- IV. Setting Goals, which provides process suggestions for involving your congregation in the work of describing your ministries and setting goals.
- V. The Missional Stretch, which helps you set goals and plans for how your congregation can stretch out from its strengths and develop new relationships with people in your neighbourhoods and community.
- VI. SMART Goals / Assessing Progress, which provides suggestions for things to consider when setting goals and how to go about assessing progress.

GETTING STARTED

Your council or board will need to set up a steering team or working group to take the lead on the process and preparing the document. A group of between 5 and 7 people is optimal. In the case of a multipoint pastoral charge, the team might need to be larger to include people from each congregation.

Their tasks will be to:

- understand the living our faith stories process and communicate this with the congregation;
- offer opportunities for the congregation to provide input regarding ministry goals;
- prepare descriptions and goals for each ministry area;
- identify the Missional Stretch goals and work them into a plan;
- prepare the final document;
- facilitate the adoption of the living our faith stories plan by the council/board or congregation (as appropriate in your setting);
- submit your living our faith stories document to the appropriate office as part of your ministerial search process.

Including the minister?

When you are doing this exercise as part of a selection process your current minister (or supply) should not be part of the steering team. If you are doing this process as a tool for congregational planning, then the minister will be part of the steering team.

A WORD ABOUT FACILITATION

Facilitation is a way of providing structure and process to dialogue without taking the reins. Taking a facilitative approach to gathering steering team and congregational input can result in a rich and creative outcome. It also helps build trust in the process and gives people a feeling of ownership in the resulting plan. Outside facilitators are able to hold up a mirror to your group by reflecting back what they are hearing and seeing. They help the group see itself more clearly and explore its assumptions and expectations more honestly.

A facilitator's task is to help every participant to do their best thinking, sharing, and listening. They do this by managing the group's process without being a participant in the discussion. They remain neutral.

Facilitators will help the group manage their discussion so that:

- there is a clear sense of purpose and process;
- group norms are set and followed;
- all participants recognize they can contribute and feel that it's safe to do so;
- different opinions are expressed and heard respectfully;
- no single individual dominates the conversation;
- assumptions are sensitively surfaced, clarified, and tested;
- themes and synchronicities are identified;
- mutual understanding is built;
- there is a sense of transparency and authenticity in the dialogue;
- the discussion moves along at a good pace, time is used well;
- the group stays on topic and on track.

Choosing a facilitator

There are no hard and fast rules about the best facilitator for your situation but there are a few things to consider as you make this decision.

- Not everybody can comfortably or effectively function as a facilitator. For example, people with strong ideas or feelings will find it extremely challenging to lead the group without adding their input.
- A good facilitator needs to be firm. Facilitation is not passive and it can take a level of assertiveness to keep people and topics on track. You are looking for someone who can be directive without dominating.

Through the experience of Toronto Southeast Presbytery, we've learned that best results come from groups that have used a skilled facilitator from outside your congregation or pastoral charge.

Finding a facilitator

You may have skilled facilitators within the congregation who would be willing to put their ideas aside for a few hours to help the group. It's a good idea to have a pair of facilitators (remember Jesus sent his followers out in twos). Co-facilitators can bring different gifts and skills to bear.

There may be skilled facilitators within your cluster or region. You may want to look to your Regional Council or to organizations like Toronto United Church Council (tucc.ca) who specialize in facilitating living our faith stories and missional stretch processes.



Living Our Faith Stories Resources

- I. Getting Started
- II. Prayer and Reflection Resources
- III. The Context for our Ministries
- IV. Setting Goals
- V. The Missional Stretch
- VI. SMART Goals