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My Story-Your Story: A Pastoral Response For 21st Century Catechesis

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Abstract: Many Catholics experience catechetical challenges as they try to keep their faith growing in the midst of “new” truths, spiritual indifference and dwindling Mass attendance. This is especially true for Black Catholics who strive to balance racism in the world and racism in the Church. This article offers a pastoral response that uses story—telling and listening—for catechesis. Using My Story-Your Story as a method of storytelling, the article expounds on how story is the foundation of communication and how it can open catechetical endeavors for the 21st century. My Story-Your Story acknowledges the role our experiences, traditions and culture play in faith formation, positioning it as a method for catechesis. As a pastoral response, it helps each person, particularly marginalized persons, find and use his or her voice for enhancing connections with others as we participate in the building up of God’s kin-dom.

Keywords: Storytelling, Story, Black Catholics, Marginalized Voices, Racism, Catechesis, Faith Formation, Religious Education, Catholicism, Religious Instruction, Teaching the Catholic Faith, Pastoral

Introduction

Stories are Beings. You invite them to live with you. They’ll teach you what they know in return for being a good host. When they’re ready to move on they’ll let you know.

Then you pass them on to someone else. —Cree Storyteller¹

I began working in parish ministry assisting my pastor with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process. Even though I said “yes” to the pastor, I was really disinterested and lacked any knowledge of RCIA. That soon changed and I found myself on an Emmaus Road meeting people who helped me discover Jesus all around me. Those

¹ Megan McKenna and Tony Cowan, *Keepers of the Story* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1997), 45.

encounters helped me understand the catechetical connection that exists between my story and your story. The exploration of this connection leads to a pastoral response for 21st century catechesis. Story is the core of this response. Nathan Jones, in *Sharing the Old, Old Story: Educational Ministry in the Black Community* states, "Story—storytelling and listening—is a central methodology of catechetical ministry."² Though story is central to catechesis, space must be created for people to speak freely about God and the Church in their lives.

As an African-American lay woman in the Catholic Church, it is often difficult to give voice to the issues and stresses one faces in life and in the Church. Storytelling has helped me find my voice and better understand my journey and its relationship to the Catholic Christian story. Through story one is able to better connect to the content and context of her or his life, such as: teachings; morals; values; culture; and ethnicity. "Story is a powerful part of human existence. We humans live an evolving narrative, or story, that forms from the storied world around us."³ By sharing our stories, we aid the community in recording and sharing history, and put it in dialogue with our current experiences so that we create a more holistic understanding of the Catholic faith. "The Gospel seeks a catechesis which is open, generous and courageous in reaching people where they live, especially in encountering those nuclei in which the most elementary and fundamental cultural exchanges take place, such as the family, the school, the work environment and free time."⁴ My Story-Your Story changes the way catechesis can be done by allowing us to narrate our story in relation to the Story.⁵ No longer led by traditional themes that ensure knowledge of the Catholic faith as led by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, our use of our own stories allows themes to arise from the stories shared, which then lead back to the *Catechism*. This paper will offer a pastoral response to catechetical challenges many Catholics experience as they try to keep their faith growing in the midst of "new" truths, spiritual indifference and dwindling Mass attendance, especially among young adults.

² Nathan Jones, *Sharing the Old, Old Story: Educational Ministry in the Black Community* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1982), 7.

³ Anne E. Streaty Wimberley, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 3.

⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1997), no. 211.

⁵ The capitalization of story is to denote the Christian Story from Salvation History through the Crucifixion of Jesus.

Storytelling

I am struck by the way people share ideas, situations, and circumstances. We tell a story. In order to fully understand, the storyteller, the person with the situation, weaves a tale, a story, while the listener takes it all in and situates him/herself around the story being told. Our stories connect our lives. Through that connection, we find that "storytelling is a fundamental way of codifying hard-won truths and dramatizing the rationale behind traditions. Thus, the tales will often end with "a message," a point, a truth to remember as one confronts life's problems."⁶ In various settings and circumstances, we find people relating to events through story. Not only in family settings are stories used to recount the past or to explain the current state of affairs, but also in business settings. Office managers, team builders, leadership trainers, supervisors and many others, use story to articulate better the points they are trying to make. Storytelling is so much a part of our lives that we often don't recognize it. "[L]ike all human activity, [it] is situated, its form, meaning, and functions rooted in culturally defined scenes or events – bounded segments of the flow of behavior and experience that constitute meaningful contexts for action, interpretation, and evaluation."⁷ Jan Carter-Black reminds us of the uniqueness of each story when she states that ". . . the structure and process of storying—how stories are told, by whom, to whom, under what circumstances, and for what specific purpose—vary according to sociocultural prescriptions."⁸ This phenomenon of telling a story to share our ideas, situations, and circumstances presents us with a way to approach catechesis in the 21st century.

In and through story we not only find our identity, share our lives, but also form community, both secular and sacred. This is evidenced by the growth in social network websites that promote community virtually. Storytelling is the vehicle that records the process. As marginalized people in the United States, Black Catholics use story for its expressive ways (rap, poetry, song writing) to tell their story and hear another's. My Story-Your Story draws on this situation and gives people a place in which to ground themselves while they examine their story using the Christian story.

⁶ Roger D. Abrahams, *African Folktales: Traditional Stories of the Black World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), xvi.

⁷ Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance and Event* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3.

⁸Ibid.

The examination of the Christian story requires a look into history, a subject that disinterests many of us. If My Story-Your Story is not told, it is not heard; if it is not heard, there is no history. William Strauss and Neil Howe have argued that, "Many [people] have difficulty placing their own thoughts and actions, even their own lives, in any larger story. . . If history seems of little personal relevance today, then what we do today seems of equal irrelevance to our own lives (and the lives of others) tomorrow. Without a sense of trajectory, the future becomes almost random. So why not live for today? What's to lose?"⁹ When history is no longer important, where you are going, your journey and destination, is confusing. My Story-Your Story addresses the confusion by reintroducing narrative as a way of encountering God in the things we experience. Nathan Jones reminds us of the value of experience when he states, "Fr. Clarence Rivers . . . points out that biblical peoples, along with Black peoples, are primarily from oral-aural traditions. Such peoples value the poetic over and above the conceptual and personal involvement over analytical detachment."¹⁰ Given the technological explosion of video and spoken word as evidenced in video games, cellular phones, video-conferencing and video-chat that young adults experience, I conclude that we are being attentive to our oral-aural nature. Thus, storytelling makes it possible to better reecho the Catholic faith.

My Story-Your Story

The linkage of My Story-Your Story speaks to the connection I believe exists between persons that make us community. My Story-Your Story strengthens that connection as each person begins to see her/his own life as part of a whole, as part of a community. My Story-Your Story is about our connections, our relationships and how they encourage us to grow. My story reveals God in my life and in doing so invites you to reveal God in yours. Megan McKenna and Tony Cowan remind us to "...tell people of the great things that God has done for you, for your story is for others and, once they have it, they can do what is necessary for them. It is no longer just yours."¹¹

In the Catholic Church, pastors, pastoral ministers, catechists, vocation directors, and others are questioning how to better engage the Body of Christ in the Catholic faith: liturgy, sacramental celebrations,

⁹ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 7.

¹⁰ Jones, 45.

¹¹ McKenna and Cowan, 188.

ministry, Church leadership, vocations, devotions, education. In the Black Catholic context, additional questions that may be asked are: "How do we maintain and strengthen our spirituality while being attacked by indifference and exclusion and by police in the streets and in our homes?" "How do we encourage young adults to take leadership roles in a Church that is not responding to racism within and outside the Church?" "How do we do faith formation in communities traumatized by violence, gun shootings, unemployment and underemployment, and voter suppression?" The My Story-Your Story connection, with its focus on story, can address the questions listed above in addition to many others. Nathan Jones tells us that story "is a central methodology of catechetical ministry [as it is] an attempt to recover a lost emphasis. Christian faith did not originally come to us as theology. The Good News came to us as story: "In the beginning ...""¹²

Story captures the senses in a way that helps us make meaning. As the foundation of a catechesis in the Black context, "it gathers an entire Christian community in a participatory experience of deepening maturity in the faith, utilizing and leaning upon God's gracious Word and Presence as revealed in the midst of black struggle, survival, and success."¹³ Catechesis that uses My Story-Your Story allows people's narratives, that explain our living and our circumstances, to unfold in a way that should provide meaning to our living. "A black Catholic catechesis can only arise out of the expression and articulation of 'how we got over' through faith, and why 'can't nobody turn us around' from our belief in Jesus—even in a Church and society ridden with racism."¹⁴

Strategies for Pastoral Response

Words carry messages, both true and false, that shape our thinking which in turn affects our relationships. As we mature, we understand our living in and through story. For Black Catholics, the narration of our story finds order and grounding in the Story of God who acts in and through our human living. However, this order is not always easily found amidst the chaos of the world. My Story-Your Story, with roots in chaos and uncertainty, provides a 21st century way to catechize the Catholic community that is in need of a more holistic understanding of the Catholic faith. Given the culture and context of Black Catholics and the importance of narrative in our lives, I offer three strategies for pastoral

¹² Jones, 7.

¹³ Toinette Eugene, "Developing Black Catholic Belief: Catechesis as Black Articulation of the Faith," *Black Catholic Theological Symposium* no. 1 (1978): 141.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141-142.

response. These strategies of response are: personal, parish, and diocesan. The first strategy, personal, cultivates story within each person. The second and third strategies offer concrete ways in which parishes and dioceses may engage in My Story-Your Story for catechesis.

Personal Pastoral Response

My Story-Your Story calls our attention to the personal dimension of story. It seeks a level of intimacy and vulnerability that many may not be ready for, not only with regard to the other, but most importantly with regard to one's self. Storytelling changes the way we approach catechesis in that our experience, tradition and culture are as important as the topic presented. We no longer disappear from the Story, but are part of it. By bringing one's own insight and transformed response to the Story, we make it possible for others to also see themselves in the Story, capable also of a transformed response.

The personal pastoral response, our personal story, when combined with a catechetical theme increases the possibility of transformation. A story will not carry the significance intended if the teller is not aware of the story's personal implications and personal impact. Therefore, to use storytelling in catechesis, the storyteller must first become comfortable with his/her own story. This narrative journey consists of, shaping my story, linking my story to the Story, and narrating my story.

Shaping My Story

Shaping my story is a process for the storyteller to become comfortable with his/her own story. This process involves a series of activities that include remembering, meditating, and theological reflection. It is important that the storyteller be aware of and bring to the activities that which makes her/him distinct: culture, tradition and experience. These aspects help the storyteller engage the contemporary culture/context with his/her own culture/context in relation to experience and tradition. In other words, the storyteller's story finds its own life before being placed in dialogue with the Story. Shaping one's own story provides the personal witness necessary to use storytelling, for story breathes life, one person to another.

Though the activities may be done in a group, they are more effective when done alone. The time allotted for each activity depends on the person; it should not be rushed, nor should it take more than

several weeks. The first activity is to create a timeline of one's life up to the present. The timeline should include as many significant events as possible: for example: confirmation, bullying/being bullied, graduation from elementary school, first job, getting a driver's license, leaving for college, births/deaths, illness, job hiring/termination, call to ministry, marriage/divorce. The duration of this activity can be shortened by listing only major events, however, doing so, does not allow for a full exploration of my story.

The second activity is to meditate on the events in the timeline, recalling any emotions, prejudices, attitudes, and reactions, personal or otherwise, associated with the events. A description of the emotions, prejudices, attitudes, and reactions is added to the timeline next to each event so that the storyteller can begin the process of addressing these feelings that will resurface in the narration of the story. In this way, the storyteller is aware of them beforehand. This activity may take several days, as the recall may bring to light things that need to be addressed with others before moving forward. This activity also prepares the storyteller to assist others in shaping their story.

The third activity is to silently read the timeline. The shape of the story begins to form through this reading, complete with the emotions, prejudices, attitudes, and reactions associated with each event. The silent reading activity should be repeated several times before the storyteller reads the timeline aloud. The familiarity with one's own story before speaking it aloud increases the comfort level. As the storytellers read their stories aloud, they become aware of the power of spoken words. In order to read it aloud, words must be added to give a more complete description of each event and to aid in the movement from one event to the next. The spoken words added to the timeline illustrate how story is formed from the facts of one's life. Once the storyteller has become comfortable with speaking his/her story, the process may be entered into again, starting with the first activity, adding more events that continue to shape the story. As the storyteller shapes her/his story, the Story looms larger.

Linking My Story to the Story

My story finds its fullness of meaning when linked to the Story by helping the storyteller move beyond the personal into the communal. To move beyond the personal, the storyteller puts into dialogue her/his experience, the story shaped, with the Christian tradition to see God acting in and through his/her life. This is a form of theological reflection

that is necessary to notice transformation. After identifying the action of God, the storyteller adds this to the timeline of events. The familiarity with my story is then enhanced as the storyteller sees the actions of God throughout the timeline. The linking of my story to the Story opens the storyteller to better understand his/her life as being in communion with God and others. At this point, the spoken words of my story take on new life as the storyteller is able to tell my story with God's Story. In recounting history, culture, wisdom, knowledge, the storyteller grounds his/her experiences in God, who calls the storyteller to active participation in the kingdom.

Narrating My Story

We tell stories that inform others of the ideas, situations, and circumstances we are experiencing. In and through our story another person is affected, life is shared. The narration of my story moves beyond the storyteller into the "public" such as: brief introductions at meetings; round table discussions at conferences; faith expression at bible study; social outreach involvement. These "public" storytelling opportunities help us better understand how the bond My Story-Your Story creates, unites the storyteller and listener to work more efficiently in spreading the gospel, because of the relational aspect of story.

Parish Pastoral Responses

Many parishes are seeking ways to involve more people in parish life yet are wary of starting a new program. The wisdom of My Story-Your Story as a pastoral response for catechesis in the parish is that it changes the parish into a welcoming one as it builds a network of persons who have narrated their story without creating a new program.

My Story-Your Story is a way of drawing upon the experiences of all persons and celebrating them in communion. Though not a program, My Story-Your Story does require personal involvement, as described in the previous section. It allows parishioners to connect their life experience to their beliefs, validating their living and in the process becoming a welcoming parish.

Strategy for Catechists/Faith Formation Directors

Current catechetical methods need to be challenged for how they foster faith formation or spiritual enrichment. The "banking" method of teaching, depositing information into people's minds for withdrawal

later, has left many with a bankrupt knowledge of the Catholic faith.¹⁵ Left with insufficient faith information, many people move on to a faith they can understand or simply rely on being “spiritual, not religious.” Faith understood within the context of day-to-day living is important for all of us as we seek to remain in the Catholic Church. My Story-Your Story, with its focus on experience and orality, moves away from the “banking” method toward a dialogical one where solutions offer better ways to deal with this world.

Following is a set of guidelines for catechists/faith formation directors to use My Story-Your Story. Catechists/faith formation directors should have already completed the personal pastoral response My Story-Your Story activities before leading others in them.

Setting the schedule and environment

The sessions should be held at least twice a month, for two hours. This schedule is important so that people are not overwhelmed by meeting too many times or underserved by not meeting often enough. The balance of twice a month takes into account absences. For example, if someone cannot attend a session of a once a month meeting means that he or she must wait an entire month before another gathering takes place. The duration of the session is a manageable amount of time. Once the days and times are set, keep them. Most people prefer knowing that their faith formation sessions are “permanent.” The space chosen should lend itself to intimacy, where people can engage in dialogue without raising their voices to be heard and persons walking by cannot hear the conversation. This space can be in the church, the rectory, or a restaurant with a private dining area. Tables and chairs should be set up so that everyone is sitting around the table facing one another. Care should be taken to use the same space for each meeting as doing so creates a stable environment and allows participants to attend when they can, knowing the location and time are the same. Environment is important in creating an intimate space. Place objects in the space that call one’s attention to the Catholic faith, i.e. a cross/crucifix; a rosary; decorative cloth; a Bible; a candle, a bowl of water. These sacramentals should be present at every meeting. Hospitality, food and beverages, should be included within the space, not in a separate area. This allows participants to move freely about the space without missing parts of the conversation.

¹⁵ See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition (New York: Continuum, 2000), 72-81, where he discusses the banking concept of education.

The Invitation

The invitation should include information about the type of session being held and the benefit of attending. It is important to be clear on the intent of the sessions, whether they are Bible study, spiritual enrichment or faith-sharing sessions. People interested in Bible study need to know that these sessions will focus on faith-sharing and vice versa. For the purposes of this discussion, our sessions will be faith formation sessions.

In good church fashion, put the information about the sessions in the bulletin, post it on the parish website, make an announcement from the pulpit, but rely mostly on personal invitation. Personal invitation extends the hand of Jesus and conveys the message that you notice the person and that he or she is important. Personal invitation also allows you to speak more about the sessions and explain why the person should come. Storytelling can play a part even here as your invitation may include a bit of my story, e.g. "Hi Carol. How are you? I'm trying something new with the faith formation group here at the parish and I'd like you to be a part of it. Yes I know you're busy, but it would really mean a lot to me if you came. The more I hear about the struggles people are having connecting their faith with their lived experience, the more determined I am to help. It was good seeing you. I hope you can attend. It meets two weeks from Monday at 7pm in the Tolton Room."

Invitations cannot be one-time occurrences. They must be extended until the person comes to a session (or tells you to leave them alone) and then may have to be extended again should they stop coming. Invitation is not only about "recruiting" people to attend sessions, it's also about listening. This requires the invitation to be part of a conversation. Keep in mind that it may not be possible to extend a personal invitation to everyone. Sometimes the invitation is extended to a spouse, child, parent, grandparent or friend who invites on your behalf. Virtual invitations through online social networking websites are another way to invite people. When attending other parish events, inform people of what you are trying to do.

The Session

Greetings are important in shaping the session; therefore, greet each person who arrives with a handshake, hug, or other appropriate gesture. Acknowledge late arrivals, with a brief recap of what has taken place. Greet them personally at a break. Briefly introduce yourself and invite others to do the same. Introductions at this point need not be more than one's name. There will be time later for people to speak more

about themselves. If there are no new people, introductions are not necessary. Open each gathering with prayer, noting that the time allotted for prayer should fit into the two hour window. Feel free to introduce different prayer styles as the group continues to meet, including explanations of the prayer styles in the discussion. After prayer, introduce the topic and break for hospitality.

Expounding upon the topic begins after the break. The topic comes to life through My Story-Your Story. My Story-Your Story teaches, encourages and challenges. No matter one's style of teaching, whether it is to lecture or to use multimedia, as the storyteller, my story needs to be part of the lesson. Including my story in the lesson illustrates your knowledge of the topic through experience, whether positive or negative. The emphasis is on experience. Here you may see more clearly why the personal response activities should be done before using this method with others.

My Story-Your Story not only requires you to tell stories, it also requires you to listen to stories. After sharing my story through the lesson, invite participants to share your story. Ask questions to help them get started, i.e. "Does prayer really make a difference in your life? Have you ever prayed for something and got it/didn't get it?" Be aware that not everyone will share your story and they should not be pressured to do so. The My Story-Your Story connections help move the discussion to theological reflection where people gain clarity on God's actions in and through the stories shared. This leads to the Story.

Having heard the stories of those present, you now reecho the part of the Story that is relevant to the chosen topic. Since prayer was used as an example previously I will stay with prayer as the Story. As the facilitator, you may cover the topic by expounding on the prayers of the Catholic Church: history, usage, devotions. You may include cultural expressions of prayer and how prayer aids can be used. Once you have explored the topic to your satisfaction, you invite the participants to see the connection between their story and the Story, thereby gaining more insight into their own story. This awareness draws them toward a response and/or action which you encourage by asking questions like: "What does prayer call you to do or be? In what way do you see prayer shaping the community?" This part of the session may be challenging for some since it calls each person to accountability, first to their story then to how their story affects another's story. The session ends with prayer after general announcements and the topic for the next gathering.

This strategy asks that the role of catechists/faith formation directors be re-envisioned from merely reechoing the Story from texts to reechoing the Story through My Story-Your Story. This change in faith formation allows for each person's culture/context, traditions and experience to be part of the process. When these aspects are part of the lessons, then a transformed response results in conversion that better understands the formation of God's kingdom. This strategy also shows how to use My Story-Your Story without starting a new program. This strategy is reinforced when it is used by the pastoral ministers/staff.

Strategy for Pastoral Ministers/Staff

Many of us want guidance as we journey "onward." We want someone to journey with us to help us realize that life doesn't have to be lived without God. Mentoring is a great way to do that and My Story-Your Story can assist pastoral ministers/staff in giving witness to the faith. As was the case with catechists/faith formation directors, pastoral ministers/staff are to complete the personal pastoral response themselves before using this strategy with others.

As people build relationships through My Story-Your Story, they develop a greater sense of self, God and other. Pastoral ministers/staff play a significant role in that they, along with catechists/faith formation directors, are called to invite, welcome and hand on the faith. Pastoral care that reflects the interests and concerns of parishioners works in harmony with catechesis that validates them and their experience. I propose several strategies for pastoral ministers/staff.

Clergy

In order to preach a relevant message, it is important to listen to the needs and concerns of one's parishioners. My Story-Your Story aids in preaching as it requires you to engage the selected scripture text in a personal way. Sharing your personal journey with the text in the homily is what helps to make the preaching relevant. Include in your homily how you came up with the title. Share how the meaning of the passage changes with each reading or homily. Though not all scripture passages will call forth a positive response from you, it is important to share that with the community. For example, preaching about your struggle and dependence on God to "make a way out of no way" teaches and encourages parishioners who often feel alone in the struggle.

On a weekly basis you have the opportunity to share the Story and my story, inviting your story. Parishioners are listening when you send

out this invitation and will respond. Help create an intentionally welcoming atmosphere. When you listen to parishioners' stories use what you can (what you have been given permission to use) in a homily. Such an action lets people know that you are paying attention. Remember, a current story is better than the one that has been forwarded through email.

Lay pastoral ministers/staff

Having completed the personal pastoral response, lay ministers are challenged to point out ways in which My Story-Your Story may take place in their current context. It is important to note that ministerial roles are catechetical in that they function to lead people to Christ or help strengthen people in Christ. Lay ministers witness their Catholic faith as they share their "walk of faith." This witness in and through story may occur when the pastoral council meets to discuss the state of the parish; when the fundraising committee meets; when ushers/greeters gather. The opportunities to share one's faith journey are endless. Lay pastoral ministers/staff may further assist parishioners by serving as one-to-one mentors who share their my stories. Mentoring nurtures both parties while being intentional in word and deed.

Diocesan Pastoral Response

Faced with shrinking budgets and a population perceived as difficult to reach or disinterested, many dioceses have eliminated or changed many of the ministries they provide for parishes. As numbers shrink, there is a growing demand from Catholics who are still active for ministries, especially catechesis, that address their specific needs. My Story-Your Story offers diocesan offices a way to address catechetical concerns. Departmental issues such as who will conduct the training or what department/agency does this fall under, will not be addressed in this strategy since each diocesan structure varies. However, as a pastoral response, this strategy may be implemented by those responsible for adult faith formation.

In the personal pastoral response section, I stated that all persons using My Story-Your Story complete this process alone though it could be done in a group setting. In this section I address how to do this process for a group, in the form of a retreat entitled, "My Story-Your Story: An Orientation to 21st Century Catechesis." This orientation is for anyone interested in using My Story-Your Story as a method of catechesis at the parish level. It is also for anyone interested in using My Story-Your Story for ministry revitalization. It is open to current

storytelling practitioners and those who wish to begin. As an orientation, it seeks to introduce My Story-Your Story and to engage participants in its performance.

The retreat – *My Story-Your Story: An Orientation to 21st Century Catechesis*

This retreat takes place over the course of three full days, including prayer and personal reflection. There are nine sessions and two storytelling presentations. Each session will use My Story-Your Story as the method for engaging the participants in the process. Session one covers the history and practice of African-American storytelling. Session two covers African-American storytelling and its relationship to faith and scripture. Session three introduces theological reflection and its role in prayer, our daily lives. Session four is an actual theological reflection session.

Session five explains My Story-Your Story, while session six explores the freedom gained through story. Session seven begins the personal story familiarity process with shaping my story activities. Session eight continues the personal story familiarity with linking my story to the Story activity. Session nine concludes the personal story familiarity with narrating my story. At the end of the retreat, participants are encouraged to return to their personal story on their own time to continue the process.

As a diocesan strategy, this retreat has the potential to enhance parish liturgies, reduce conflict between generations, and more effectively help multicultural parishes unite. The table labeled retreat schedule shows the flow of the retreat.

Retreat Schedule

	Day One	Day Two	Day Three
0800-0830	Arrival/Check-in	Breakfast	Breakfast
0845	Welcome/Retreat Facility Orientation		
0900	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
0915-1015	Session 1 - African- American Storytelling	Session 5 - My Story-Your Story	Session 8 - Linking My Story to The Story Activity
1030-1130	Session 2 - African- American Storytelling, Faith and Scripture	Session 6 - Freedom Through Story	Session 8 continues
1130-1215	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1230-1330	Personal Time	Personal Time	Session 9 - Narrating My Story Activity
1345-1445	Session 3 - Theological Reflection	Session 7 - Shaping My Story Activities	Session 9 continues
1500-1645	Session 4 - Theological Reflection Activity	Session 7 continues	Conclusion Closing Prayer
1700-1800	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner (optional)
1830-2000	Storytelling Presentation	Storytelling Presentation	
2030	Evening Prayer	Evening Prayer	

Conclusion

Since the beginning of time folks have always wanted to spread the word. The ones who can spread the word the most effectively have the ability to “talk dat talk” and “walk dat walk.” . . . In the African-American culture, past and present, these folks have gone by many names. Today they are called preachers, healers, teachers, comedians, blues singers, poets, dancers, rappers, liars, painters, and historians. . . . The storyteller, the story, and the audience are of equal importance.

—Linda Goss and Marian E. Barnes¹⁶

¹⁶ Linda Goss and Marian E. Barnes, eds. *Talk That Talk: An Anthology of African-American Storytelling* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 10.

I realize that measuring faith formation and spiritual development can only be done by the individual and challenged by the catechist. Yet, I contend that the catechist is able to determine a person's starting point and measure progress through the dialogue that occurs. The fact that catechesis is ongoing and cyclical means that there will be setbacks as people face adversity. However personal, it is possible to measure the efficacy of My Story-Your Story as a pastoral response for 21st century catechesis.

The evaluation consists of a series of surveys to be taken prior to using My Story-Your Story, after using the method for three months/twelve weeks, and after one year. The survey is designed to gather current spiritual, liturgical, and service-oriented activity. This survey should be informal so participants do not feel that their answers will be judged in any way. It is not necessary for the survey to be distributed in a written form, but the responses of each person will need to be recorded for tracking purposes. You may suggest that participants themselves write their responses so that they may see their own progress. The questions¹⁷ for the survey are as follows:

- Is prayer a part of your life? If so, how often do you pray?
- Are you involved in any volunteer service-oriented activities such as feeding the hungry, working at a shelter, tutoring, coaching, or cleaning graffiti off buildings?
- Do you attend church services? If so, where and how often?
- For those of you who attend church services, do you participate in any ministry, organization, project at the church?

After using this method for three months/twelve weeks the following should occur: increased frequency of personal prayer; participation in devotions and/or spiritual reading; increased church attendance or dialogue about attending church; participation in a volunteer service-oriented project. After one year increased involvement in church ministry and facilitation of at least one weekly session should occur. After two years of using this method, participants should be able to facilitate the weekly sessions and/or start other groups and take on leadership roles in the church. It should be noted that the evaluation is not measuring a person's faith level, but the effectiveness of a method to 'hand down' the faith.

¹⁷ These questions are not in any order of importance and may be modified to better accommodate your community.

The equality of storyteller, story and audience speaks to the bond of My Story-Your Story and the Story. "The goal . . . is to use storytelling to strengthen people's personal and interpersonal growth so that they can respond to God's salvation drama as it unfolds and as it has an impact on their lives."¹⁸ Theological reflection helps us see how God's story intersects our lives, calling us to action.

My Story-Your Story contains some essential characteristics which I think allow it to be used for the building up of the whole person. My story-Your story is holistic; transformative and communal. We can no longer just hand over information and expect people to accept it without addressing physical conditions, emotional wellbeing, and intellectual capabilities. My Story-Your Story as a pastoral response opens the door for these concerns to be addressed by listening and offering encouragement.

With so many things competing for people's attention, the Church must compete in such a way as to not be filtered out. The Church has to embrace many of the marketing strategies used in the business sector e.g. interactive websites; social networking; video-sharing and podcasting. Pastors and their staffs must listen to people's concerns and respond with respect and appreciation.

It takes work to grow in faith and the transformation cannot be made from the outside looking in. As we learn more about our faith, we find our voice. Our voice sometimes demands silence in order to converse with God and is not afraid to speak truth in a room full of Catholics ignoring the margins. Twenty-first century catechesis is about helping people navigate through the flood of information to hear God's clarifying voice.

¹⁸ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 7.

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