

New Places for New People

Starting new Christian
communities:
A practical guide

Chapter 19

Owning and
Sharing the
Story

Owning and Sharing the Story

“The difference between data and story is this: Data lists what happened; story expresses how and why it happened.”¹

People love to tell and hear stories because they help us reflect on our place in the world, to identify with the characters, and ask questions of where we find meaning in what unfolds. And at the heart of the Christian faith is the story of God’s love and redemption that invites all people to respond. That story is told in the Bible and in the living people whose faith we encounter.

Telling the story of a New Places for New People (NPNP) brings life and character to the important work of reflecting, learning and evaluating. Good storytelling builds bridges with others, raises awareness of the NPNP, encourages others to join in or offer support, affirms those who have worked for the project, and is a wide-reaching and powerful way of sharing good news and inspiring others to start an NPNP too.

Here are some helpful pointers on how to tell a good story...

1. Start with God and with people

The story of God’s interaction with humankind is discovered in the Bible in the form of poems, history, codes of law, and parables. The gospels provide many perspectives on the stories of Jesus’ life, which reveals the good news of God’s love for all. The love of God is also revealed in the story-filled world of the human community, including within the story of your NPNP community. As you reflect on your context, what stories of God and people are emerging?

- God guiding the pioneer and pioneering team.
- The new people who have joined your community and encountered the grace of God.
- The people from the local community who have supported you as part of their discipleship.
- The people who have prayed, supported and advocated for the project out of their deep faith and love.

2. Tell stories of transformed relationships

Each NPNP has a unique story that adds depth and colour to the emerging picture of NPNPs in the Methodist Church. These stories will be diverse and varied, reflecting the different communities and the people they serve. We celebrate the way each community will look wonderfully different, while the same desire for new people to be transformed by an encounter with the love of God is central in all. As you narrate the story of your NPNP community we encourage you to tell the story through the lens of relationships...

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¹ Robert McKee, *Storynomics: Story-Driven Marketing in the Post-Advertising World* (Hachette, USA, 2018), p xix

- **With God:** How has the NPNP enabled someone to become more aware of their relationship with the one who loves them, and to begin an active journey of faith?
- **With ourselves:** How has a person begun to understand themselves as precious and started to take seriously their human flourishing?
- **With community:** In what ways has an encounter with God enabled an individual to have better and more life-giving relationships with others, both locally and globally?
- **With creation:** How has the community learnt to live gratefully for the wonder of creation and been compelled to be good stewards of it?

3. Tell stories of key moments and turning points

Captivating stories are full of ups and down, jeopardy and triumphs, challenges faced and overcome, and characters facing adversity in pursuit of their goal. We invite you to highlight key moments for the NPNP which signified a breakthrough, an affirmation of a tough choice, or the point at which the vision began to be realised. Here are some examples:

- The one-to-one conversation that opened the door to a series of new opportunities.
- The first community event when lots of people you had built relationships with attended.
- The way a simple rhythm of prayer established in the team.
- The moment the first new person joined your gathering.

Consider what it was about that turning point that was so significant. Why did it mean so much? What happened as a result?

4. Tell stories with integrity

Honest storytelling

It is important to tell the story of how things have gone well, but it is often the mistakes and the things that did not quite work that will encourage others more. A fruitful community has as many stories of trying and failing, of complicated relationships and events that missed the mark, as it does of things running to plan.

The honest sharing of these moments of struggle, frustration, and feeling overwhelmed will enable the beauty of what has started to shine more brightly. A story that makes everything seem easy is more likely to make people feel that they cannot do it. A story of ordinary people trusting, failing, and trying again will inspire more people to begin something new.

Whose story is it to tell?

There can be a temptation to tell someone's story on their behalf and though this may be with the best intentions, because of our biases, this can distort the truth and also take from the person whose story it is. As your NPNP community engages new people, think of creative ways you can enable them to articulate their story of why the community is important and how faith has become a part of their life. Some good questions to ask:



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- Who does this story belong to?
- Why do we want to tell this story?
- Are we manipulating this story in any way?
- Are our stories from a diverse range of sources?
- Do we only tell positive stories?
- What can we learn from sharing stories of things not going as we had planned or hoped?

Telling the story safely

In every community people need to be protected. As the story of your community is told, these simple guidelines need to be followed.

- Permission needs to be sought to use someone else's story.
- Only use the details you have permission to share. In most cases it is wise to only use first names, and sometimes you may be required to use a pseudonym.
- If a child is telling their story, permission needs to be given by their parent or guardian.
- When images are used, you must get written consent from the featured people (and parents/guardians of featured children). See 'Further resources' below.
- When telling stories via social media, ensure you're following best practice. See 'Further resources' below.

It's not just words!

A well-written story is important, but remember it is easier than ever to take a picture, record a film, or create a piece of music or prose. It takes planning and effort to regularly collect different media content but the benefit is a creative resource to draw on to share your NPNP story, populate online media and reflect on your journey with God as a community.

Further resources

A helpful guide to telling your story can be found on the Story Project website: www.thestoryproject.org.uk/resources/how-to-build-a-culture-of-lay-testimony-in-your-church

For consent forms for images: www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/policies-procedure-and-information/forms

Social media guidance: www.methodist.org.uk/socialmediaguidelines