



Creating a Collective Vision: Story of Us—Story of Now

Introduction

With your participation and collaboration, we are asking the participants and congregations that are at the center of the Standing on the Side of Love campaign to join us in a process of collective visioning.

Collective visioning and storytelling involves intentionally bringing people together to generate a positive vision based on our deeply held values and dreams. It is also about action planning so that we are prepared to actively work towards what we envision.

Creating a Shared Story

Each of us has a compelling story to tell.

Storytelling is central to who we are as humans. Using stories we are able to convey both who we are as individuals, and who we are as a group, as a movement, and as a society. Developing and sharing our own story, a story of self, gives individuals the power to convey what it is that motivates and inspires.

When combined, these stories of self create a story of us that can be even more powerful as it connects individuals in a community with a shared history, shared values, and shared vision.

Organizing, including congregational organizing, is rooted in shared values and expressed in stories as public narrative. Placed in the context of the present moment – a moment punctuated with the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement – these shared values and public narrative give direction and force to our efforts.

Elements of Public Narrative

Public narrative is how we communicate our values through stories, bringing alive the motivation that is necessary for creating a better world. Through public narrative, we tell the story of why we are called to act and to lead. **Public narrative combines a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now:**

1. “Story of Self” tells the values that move YOU to act—calls you to lead.
2. “Story of US” tells the values embedded in our community calling us to collective action.
3. “Story of Now” tells the challenges to those values and clarifies why action must be taken NOW. The Story of Now also invites others to start taking specific action immediately.



This guide is designed to help you and your groups and congregations tell your stories of self, story of us, and story of now as a part of our collective visioning process.

Building a public narrative can be done in a variety of settings from whole congregation or leadership team potlucks, to house meetings, to one-to-one conversations, to taking time right in a worship service. No matter what venue you choose, you will want to give people time to tell a story of self, identify key stories that define your congregation or community and constitute the story of us, pointing to current challenges and specific actions that constitute the story of now.

Story of Self, Story of Us, and Story of Now

By telling a “story of self” you can communicate the values that move you to act. Public leaders face the challenge of enabling others to “get” the values that move them to lead. The effective communication of motivating values can establish grounds for trust, empathy, and understanding. In its absence, people will infer our motivations, often in ways that can be very counterproductive. Telling our story of self can help establish firm ground for leadership, collaboration and discovering common purpose.

Every one of us has a compelling story of self to tell. We all have characters or actual people (parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, colleagues) in our lives we love, whose stories influence our own values. And we all have made choices in response to our own challenges that shape our life’s path— confrontations with pain, moments of hope, calls to action.

For our “story of self,” the key focus is on our choices, those moments in our lives when our values moved us to act in the face of challenge. When did you first care about being heard? When did you feel you had to act? Why did you feel you could? What were the circumstances, the place, the colors, sounds? What did it look like? The power in your story of self is to reveal something of those moments that were deeply meaningful to you in shaping your life—not your deepest private secrets, but the events that shaped your public life. Learning to tell a good story of self demands the *courage of introspection*, and of sharing some of what you find.

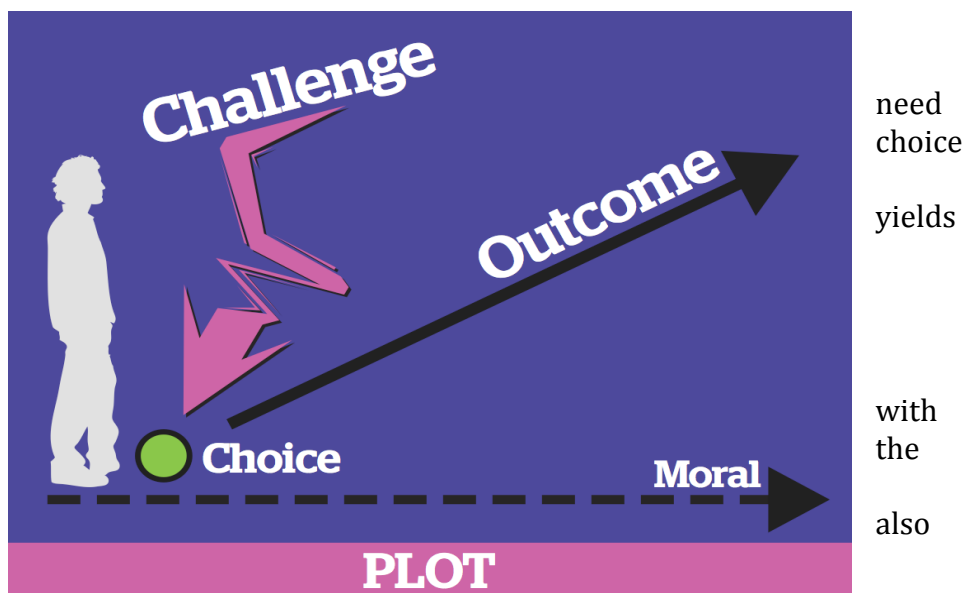
By telling a “story of us” you can communicate values that can inspire others to act together by identifying with each other, not only with you. Just as with a story of self, the key choice points in the life of a community – its founding, crises it has faced, or other events that everyone remembers – are moments that express the values shared. Consider stories that members of your congregation or group have shared, especially those that held similar meaning for all of you. The key is to focus on telling a specific story about specific people at a specific time that can remind everyone – or call to everyone’s attention – values that you share. Telling a good story of us requires the *courage of empathy* – to consider the experience of others deeply enough to take a chance on articulating that experience.

By telling a “story of now” you can communicate the urgent challenge we are called upon to face, the hope that we can face it, and choices we must make to act. A story of now requires telling stories that bring the urgency of the challenge alive: urgency because of a need for change that cannot be denied, urgency because of a moment of opportunity that may not return. At the intersection of the urgency and the promise of hope is a choice that must be made – to act, or not to act, to act in this way, or in that. Telling a good story of now requires the *courage of imagination*, or as Dr. Walter Brueggemann named it, a prophetic imagination, in which you call attention both to the pain of the world and also to the possibility for a better future.

The Three Key Elements of Public Narrative Structure: Challenge, Choice, Outcome

A story’s plot begins with a challenge that confronts a character with an urgent to pay attention, to make a for which s/he is unprepared. The choice an outcome, and the outcome teaches a moral.

Because we can empathetically identify the character, we can “feel” moral. We hear “about” someone’s courage; we are inspired by it.



The story of the character and their choices encourages listeners to think about their own values, and challenges, and inspires them with new ways of thinking about how to make choices in their own lives.



Incorporating Challenge, Choice, and Outcome in Your Own Story

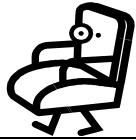
There are some key questions you need to answer as you consider the choices you have made in your life and the path you have taken that brought you to this point in time. Once you identify the specific relevant choice, dig deeper by answering the following questions.

Challenge: Why did you feel it was a challenge? What was so challenging about it? Why was it your challenge?

Choice: Why did you make the choice you did? Where did you get the courage (or not)? Where did you get the hope (or not)? Did your parents' or grandparents' life stories teach you in any way how to act in that moment? How did it feel?

Outcome: How did the outcome feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

A word about challenge. Sometimes people see the word challenge and think that they need to describe the misfortunes of their lives. Keep in mind that a struggle might be one of your own choosing – a high mountain you decided to climb as much as a valley you managed to climb out of. Any number of things may have been a challenge to you and can be the source of a good story to inspire others.



TEAM BREAKOUT SESSION: Story of Self Practice

GOALS

- Practice telling your Story of Self and get constructive feedback
- Learn to draw out and coach the stories of others

AGENDA

TOTAL TIME: 35 min.* or more depending on size of team

1. Gather in your team.

Choose a **timekeeper and notetaker.**

2. Develop your “Story of Self”

5min.

Take 5 minutes to **silently develop your “Story of Self,”** using the worksheet that follows.

Work with a partner to practice telling your Story of Self.

10 min.

For each person:

- 3.**
- 2 minutes each to tell your story:
 - Focus on the values you want to convey and the experiences that shaped you.
 - Be specific & give lots of details.
 - 3 minutes each for feedback:
 - What **values** did the storyteller convey? How specifically?
 - What is the **Challenge, Choice, and Outcome** in each story?
 - Were there sections of the story that had especially good details or images (sights, sounds, smells, or emotions of the moment)?

4. As a team, go around the group and tell your Story of Self one by one.

***15min.**

For each person:

- 2 minutes to tell their story
- 3 minutes to for feedback on each story

NOTE: You have just 2 minutes to tell your story. Stick to this limit. Make sure your timekeeper cuts you off. This makes sure everyone has a chance to tell their story.

6. Pick one person to tell their story to the Full Group & Return

5 min.



WORKSHEET: Developing Your Story of Self

Before you decide what part of your story to tell, think about these questions:

1. What will I be calling on others to do?
2. What values move me to take action and might also inspire others to similar action?
3. What stories can I tell from my own life about specific people or events that would show (rather than tell) how I learned or acted on those values?

What are the experiences in your life that have shaped the values that call you to leadership in this congregation?

FAMILY & CHILDHOOD

- Parents/Family
- Growing Up
- Your Community
- Role Models

LIFE CHOICES

- School / Career
- Partner / Family
- Hobbies / Interests / Talents
- Overcoming Challenge

ORGANIZING EXPERIENCE

- First Experience of organizing
- Connection to key books or people

Think about the challenge, choice and outcome in your story – the challenges you faced, the choices you made, and the outcomes you experienced.

- **Challenge:** Why was it a challenge? What was so challenging about it?
- **Choice:** Why did you make the choice you did? Where did you get the courage – or not? Where did you get the hope – or not? How did it feel?
- **Outcome:** How did the outcome feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

Try drawing pictures here instead of words. Post butcher paper around the room that people can draw on directly or tape on individual pictures. Powerful stories leave your listeners with images in their minds that shape their understanding of you and your calling.

CHALLENGE:	CHOICE:	OUTCOME:



Put it All Together Into Your Own Story of Self:

Stories of self can be generated and told at congregational and leadership team potlucks and gatherings, house meetings, 1-to-1 conversations, or during worship services.

1) For gatherings have each group choose one story of self that is told to the full group in just 2 mins. Plan your time for storytelling to the full group according to the number of groups (e.g. 20 mins for groups of 10). Following each story, a facilitator asks the group what values they heard reflected in the story.

2) For use during a worship service ask people to reflect on time in their lives when they faced a challenge, a choice, and there was a definite outcome that changed their lives and from which they learned an important life lesson. Ask them to write it down on an index card (already available in the Order of Service) and to add their name and if they are willing to share their story. Collect the cards and tell the congregation that they will hear some of these stories at the next worship service.

OR Post butcher paper around the sanctuary or room that people can draw on directly or tape on individual pictures. (Provide drawing paper, crayons etc.)

For Further Reflection

We all live very rich, complex lives, with many challenges, many choices, and many outcomes of both failure and success. That means we can never tell our whole life story in 2 minutes. The challenge is to learn to interpret our life stories as a practice, so that we can teach others based on reflection and interpretation of our own experiences, and choose stories to tell from our own lives based on what's appropriate in each unique situation.

Take time to reflect on your own public story, beginning with your story of self. You may go back as far as your parents or grandparents, or you may start with your most recent efforts and keep asking yourself why in particular you got involved when you did. Focus on challenges you had to face, the choices you made about how to deal with those challenges, and the satisfactions – or frustrations - you experienced. Why did you make those choices? Why did you do this and not that? Keep asking yourself “why?”

What did you learn from reflecting on these moments of challenge, choice, and outcome? How do they feel? Do they teach you anything about yourself, about your family, about your peers, your community, your nation, your world, about what really matters to you? What about these stories is so intriguing? Which elements offered real perspective into your own life?

What brings you to this campaign? When did you decide to do the work you're done now? Why? When did you decide to volunteer? Why? When did you decide to give up time for this training session? Why?

Many of us active in public leadership have stories of both loss and hope. If we did not have stories of loss, we would not understand that loss is a part of the world, and we would have no reason to try to fix it. But we also have stories of hope. Otherwise we wouldn't be trying to fix it.

Story of Us & Now

Goals:

- Learn how to tell the story of your leadership team and/or congregation in a way that reflects shared values, hopes and experiences
- Learn how to tell a story that motivates others to join in a specific action now
- Learn how to coach others effectively to tell their own Story of Us & Now

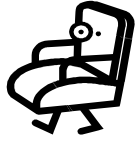
Linking Story of Self, Story of Us and Now

A story of self tells people who you are and why you are called to do the work or ministry that you are doing. On its own, the story of self is insufficient to set the stage for collective action. Since organizing is about building power with others for shared action, your public narrative also needs to tell a story of the community you're forming together, and a story of the action you are asking others to join you in taking.

The Character in the Story of Us & Now is the congregation, community or organization you are building.

Our story of self is interwoven with stories we share with others through the congregations, communities, and organizations we are a part of, which have stories of their own. These include stories of our family, community, faith tradition, school, profession, organizations, movements, nations, and perhaps, world. It is through shared stories that we establish the identities and express the values of the communities in which we participate (family, faith, and nation) and of the new communities we are forming (new social movements, new organizations, and new neighborhoods).

Telling a "Story of Us" requires learning how to put into narrative form the specific experiences that the "us" in the room share with each other. Telling a "Story of Us" is a way to engage a community in acting together, based on values that we share. When we tell stories that reflect the challenges we face and the possibilities we may achieve together in detail and image, we begin to build new community and new organization around values rather than just issues or interests alone.



TEAM BREAKOUT SESSION: Story of Us Practice

GOALS

- Develop a Story of Us.
- Learn how to integrate a story about the congregation, community, and team you're building at this gathering and/or training from the stories of self.
- Coach others' stories by listening carefully, offering feedback, and asking questions.

AGENDA

TOTAL TIME: 40 min.

- 1. Gather in your Team** **5 min**
Nominate 1 person to be a timekeeper.
- 2. Brainstorm the Story of Us** **10 min**

As a team, discuss the following questions to help you develop the Us:

- What stories during the gathering and/or training have had the greatest impact on you and your team?
- What have you seen, heard and experienced that demonstrate your congregation's/community's/team's values and commitment?
(from people's story of self, challenge / choice / hope, etc.)
- What stories could we tell about this congregation or community and our vision for the future that would inspire others to join the Us? What values did we hear in the stories of self that tell the story of us?
- What specific stories reveal the challenges we face as a congregation or community now?

- 3. Develop your Own Story of Us** **5 min**
Use the worksheet below to silently develop what you hear as the Story of Us.
- 4. Share your Stories of Us with you Team** **15 min**

Go around the team and share your Story of Us one by one.

For each person:

- 3 minutes to tell their Story of Us

- 5. Pick one person to tell a story of Us & Now to the Full Group & Return** **5 min**

For use in Worship Service: A team reads through the stories of self gathered at a worship service or from '1-to-1s' and creates a story of us. Highlights from many stories of self can be shared, or one or two could be shared that resonate with values of many other stories and from there the Story of Us & Now is developed and shared based on the values and concerns that the stories lift up.



WORKSHEET:
 Developing Your Story of Us & Now

The purpose of the Story of US & Now is to create a sense of community and invite the listener to join your community in taking action and making a difference.

Your goal is to tell a story that:

1. **Creates the “Us”**, gives a sense of who is involved and what shared values unite “the Us.”
2. **Shows the Challenge** we face that makes the need for action urgent.
3. **Gives us Hope** that we can make specific change that will lead to a better outcome.
4. **Invites us to make a Choice** to join the community by taking a specific, strategic action now.

Use this chart to help you put together your Story of Us & NOW. Powerful stories leave your listeners with images in their minds that shape their understanding of you and your calling.

Try drawing pictures here instead of words. Post butcher paper around the sanctuary or room that people can draw on directly or tape on individual pictures. (Provide drawing paper, crayons etc.)

Create the “Us”

Who is the US you want people to feel a part of? How will you celebrate the diversity of the Us? What specific stories of self have you heard that will inspire others? What common values do we share? What specifically have we experienced and done together?

Challenge:

What is the challenge our community faces? Make the challenge real with images and stories, not just facts.

Hopeful Outcome:

What do we hope for? Where does that hope come from? How do we know that we can make change? What images of the future reflect how things could be?

Choice:

What specific choice are you asking others to make? What is our strategy? What specific action do we need others to join us in taking?



WORKSHEET: Developing Your Story of Now

Skillful Leadership and Facilitation is required to move from several stories of Us & Now to specific action(s). Leaders are challenged to identify the most powerful story or stories of Us & Now and make an 'altar call' or call for commitment.--15 mins.

The Story of Now describes an urgent challenge facing your congregation or community, a hopeful vision of what life could be, and a specific choice others can make that will move us towards that vision...NOW.

Now we know why you've been called to a particular mission, we know something of who it is you want to call upon to join you in that mission, so what action does that mission require of you right here, right now, in this place?

A "Story of Now" is urgent; it requires dropping other things and paying attention; it is rooted in the values you celebrated in your stories of Self and Us, and requires action.

Narrative Structure: Challenge, Choice, Outcome

Remember the story structure we introduced in telling your Story of Self?

Just like in your Story of Self, your Story of Us and Now has a clear challenge, choice and outcome:

The Challenge: The challenges your community has faced in the past, or faces now (made real with stories, images, and details, not just statistics).

The Outcome (hope): Stories with vivid images and detail that remind your audience of what you've already achieved together in the past, AND stories that create a vision of what specifically you could achieve in the future if you act together now.

The Choice: A specific, actionable, strategic choice that you can ask others to make to join your community in action RIGHT NOW. (Like signing up to volunteer or getting on the phone right now to recruit 2 more people to join them at the next event or joining the congregation's Standing on the Side of Love Rapid Response Team.)

Your story needs to be urgent! It requires dropping other things and paying attention, it is rooted in the values you celebrated in your Story of Self and Us, and requires action now.

Why It Matters The choice we're called on to make is a choice to commit to strategic action now. Leaders who only describe problems, but fail to identify a way to act and bring others together to address the problem, aren't exercising good leadership. If you are called to address a real challenge, a challenge so urgent you have motivated us to face it as well, then you also have a responsibility to invite us to join you in action that has some chance of success. A "Story of Now" is not simply a call to make a choice to act – it is a call to "hopeful" action—action with a clear strategy behind it that we believe can make a difference.



Stories begin shifting power relationships by building new community and new capacity. Often after we've heard others' stories of self and we've started building relationships together, we discover that we face similar challenges that are rooted in very deep systems of power inequality. Learning to tell Stories of Us is a way to join our stories together and acknowledge those shared challenges and the roots of the problem as a community. However a good Story of Us doesn't just convey the root of our challenges, but also lifts up our heroes and stories of even small successes. Those stories give us hope that, if we come together and take action as a community, we can uproot some of the underlying causes of our suffering.

When you tell a powerful Story of Now, and ask others to make a specific choice to join you in action, you are beginning to build new power together from the community around you to address the challenges in your lives.

Tying Together All the Pieces Into a Successful Public Narrative

As Rabbi Hillel's powerful words suggest, to stand for yourself is the first step, but insufficient on its own. You must also find or create a community to stand with, and that community must begin acting now. To combine the stories of Self, Us and Now, you have to find the link between why you are called to this mission, why we as a community are called to this mission, and what our mission calls on us to do now.

That linking may require you to continually rethink the Stories of Self, Us & Now that you are working on.

“If I Am Not For Myself, Who Will Be For Me? But If I Am Only For Myself, What Am I? If Not Now, When?”

-- Hillel
Jewish sage and scholar

Storytelling is a dynamic, non-linear process.

Each time you tell your story you will adapt it – to make yourself clearer, to adjust to a different audience, to locate yourself in a different context. As you develop a Story of Us, you may find you want to alter your Story of Self, especially as you begin to see the relationship between the two more clearly. Similarly, as you develop a Story of Now, you may find it affects what went before. And, as you go back to reconsider what went before, you may find it helps clarify your Story of Now.

Storytelling takes practice.

Our goal during this session is not to leave with a final “script” of your public narrative that you will use over and over again during your campaign. The goal is to help you learn a process by which you can generate an authentic narrative over and over and over again, when, where, and how you need to in order to motivate yourself and others to specific, strategic action. Otherwise, a congregation's or group's story becomes static leading to inaction along with no growth or decline.

Further Reflection

Just as you can't cover your whole life story in 2 minutes, the team and community you are building is too complex and rich to sum up in 3 minutes. Again, the challenge is to reflect on and interpret the experiences you've had in the team, the stories you've heard and shared across team members, and the values that you share. Based on that reflection, craft a story about your team.

The Story of Us & Now could change even more frequently than your Story of Self will. Every time your team adds a new member, or plans another action, or has a success (or loss); your team has a new story to draw



on. So think of this story work as a constant leadership practice; make sure your story stays fresh--add new details to reflect who you are and who your team is in the here and now!



WORKSHEET:
Building Your Team's Stories of Us & Now

Building Your Team's "Story of Us & Now" As you hear each other's stories, keeping track of the details of each person's story will help you to provide feedback and remember details about people on your team later. Use the grid below to track your team's stories.

NAME	WHO WAS THE US AND WHAT WERE THE VALUES?	WHAT WAS THE CHALLENGE TO THE US?	WHAT CHOICE WAS GIVEN?	WHAT OUTCOME COULD WE ACHIEVE?