

Summary of *Story Matters*: Naming, Claiming, and Living Our Biblical Identity

Story Matters is a new ELCA resource designed by folks involved with Faith Practices, the Book of Faith Initiative, and Mission Development.

Goal:

To help congregations discover and articulate, in a deep and biblically based conversation, their unique identity and mission so that that each congregation might:

- Discern their congregational story within the biblical story
- Use their biblical story to discover and engage together their congregational identity and mission

The Proposal:

Congregations are invited to participate in a conversation that centers on the biblical story that they identify for themselves as their defining story.

(A biblical story, broadly understood, might be any biblical passage – a parable, a psalm, a set of verses, a book, a narrated event, or any well defined passage.)

Members of a congregation discover and explore this story together. Through the process of naming and exploring this story they will ask questions about their own stories as a congregation and a community. Extensive engagement with their chosen passage will help the congregation to form their identity as a missional community, to deepen their practice of faith, and to live out their specific vocation as a called and sent community of disciples.

Two defining invitations and questions will guide this conversation:

➤ Invitation #1 Discover and Name Our Biblical Story

Question #1 What biblical story best captures our own stories of who we are and who God is calling us to be?

➤ Invitation #2 Live into and out of Our Biblical Story

Question #2 How might our biblical story gather us together and help to form us as a community of disciples called to mission in our community and the world?

Step One: Discover and Name Our Biblical Story

Gather the community and claim a defining biblical story.

The goal of this step is to help the gathered members of the congregation to identify and claim a story from the Bible that best expresses the identity and commitments of the congregation. That is, the goal is to discover a biblical story that both tells your congregational story and informs your congregational commitments and calling.

How we tell our stories can be as crucial as what stories we tell. Part of the overall goal of Story Matters is to tell our stories in such a way that they connect to God's story. One approach is to wonder aloud how we, as individuals and as a congregation, have lived out our baptismal promises: What is our baptismal story? What marks us as living among God's faithful people? What events have led us to hear God's word and to share in the Lord's Supper? When have we, alone or collectively, proclaimed the good news to others, served others, or striven for justice and peace?

Step Two: Learn, Live, and Share Our Biblical Story

Gather around and live deeply into your defining biblical story. Discover the grace of dwelling richly in one story over time. Put your story at the center of your ongoing conversation, and explore ways to live out of your story. The goal of this step is to take extended time to gather around and live deeply into and out of your defining story. Journey with your chosen story allowing it to seep into the congregation and deepen your practice of discipleship, both individually and as a congregation. Follow the call of your biblical story, allowing it to inform how you listen to, speak with, and act on behalf of the broader community, both near and far.

Some questions we are encouraging folks to ask include: Are we deepening our engagement with Scripture? Are we deepening our engagement with one another? Are we deepening our spiritual practices and being changed in the process? Are we better understanding and acting on our calling? Has our engagement with our biblical story compelled us to better serve our communities? Have we shared our faith motivation with the larger community?

An initial guide to *Story Matters* is available at www.bookoffaith.org and the Faith Practices page at www.elca.org.