



Mission Storytelling: How Your Story Becomes the Community's Story

Scripture reassures us, "No one who trusts God like this—heart and soul—will ever regret it." It's exactly the same no matter what a person's religious background may be: the same God for all of us, acting the same incredibly generous way to everyone who calls out for help. "Everyone who calls, 'Help, God!' gets help."

But how can people call for help if they don't know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they haven't heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them? And how is anyone going to tell them, unless someone is sent to do it? That's why Scripture exclaims,

A sight to take your breath away! Grand processions of people telling all the good things of God! (Rom. 10:11–15 The Message)

Storytelling is as old as language. I imagine you can recall stories from your earliest memories. Its wonderful to tell stories. Songs, poems, and rhymes are delightful ways to share stories with our children. In the beginning, we had our voice. God sent us on a mission so important, that images, symbols, music, and later, sophisticated writing, then tools, were all employed to help us tell God's story; our stories. Stories of hope, joy, and triumph. Stories of pain, sorrow, and death. Stories conveyed life, growth, and framed the emerging future.

God's story of life and purpose became a story incarnate in Jesus Christ. The logos of God became human. The story was visible, audible and transferable. Shared with the Twelve, the Seventy, and the thousands, Jesus' story became the empowered story built on the cascading events of Jesus' death, resurrection, appearances, ascension, and promised return. The Spirit's indwelling at Pentecost ensured that empowered storytellers would keep the story going.

Jesus' story (like so many biblical narratives) became the apostle Paul's story because it was transformative. It was conveyed to Paul on the road to Damascus through blinding light, dramatic voice, and immersive experience resulting in redirection. Paul was changed, and his story became the Roman's story, too. Paul persuaded the Roman's to

keep the story going. Jesus' message of good news constituted a lifesaving relationship that changed lives. It was a story of impact, drama, and engagement. It was a story worth telling in every way possible.

Our Presbyterian story had impact on the world as Reformation leaders harnessed the (then) new technology of Gutenberg's printing press to tell their story on an incredible scale. Today, digital communication, social media, and mobile devices can increase the clarity, reach, and impact of the story God created us to tell. Paul's vision is being realized when he wrote of a, "sight to take your breath away! Grand processions of people telling all the good things of God!"

Storytelling is the task of the church. How can your story be more effectively conveyed to achieve impact?

Storytelling in Three Acts

When individuals gather as a congregation, the story of unique individuals becomes the church's story, too. How can we pay better attention to that story? Your church's story is more than theological or liturgical. It includes the story told through our building and grounds outside, and the feeling people get when they are welcomed inside. It is the story of satisfaction in ministry, energized to make the world different. To have life-changing impact, God's story resonates deeply through your story using three components of persuasive storytelling: Empathy (Greek: pathos), Credibility (Greek: ethos), and Logic (Greek: logos).

Act One: Empathy

Empathy is rooted within the DNA of your church, but it can be developed through learning. Understanding and clarifying your church's values and priorities, and also understanding others values and priorities is essential to effective storytelling; storytelling that can transform lives. When the story is all about the storyteller, little empathy is expressed, and impact on others is marginal. Self-referential storytelling is rarely interesting and usually ineffective. However, when the storyteller pays attention to others, and captures the experiences, emotions, and context of the hearers within the story, empathy rises which empowers life-changing behaviors.

"Don't talk to their minds, talk to their hearts." - Nelson Mandela

Congregational Empathy in Practice: What is going on in your community? What do you see, and hear? What are young people concerned about? What are business leaders concerned about? Gaining understanding, seeking answers to these kinds of questions, can increase the empathy expressed in your ministry. From the perspective of others, what one change or improvement would offer the greatest benefit that your church's ministry could be part of?

Act Two: Credibility

Credibility is mostly learned, but is connected to the church's experience. Some churches have credibility accrued from their historical community relationship. More than a few congregations are depicted on a town's official seal, or represented on physical and digital community marques. Though historical integrity is critical, it raises the bar of expectation. If a congregation's recent credibility is not congruent with its reputation, significant challenges must be addressed.

Credibility refers to the church's character. Character is what we do when no one is looking. It is the story that is told when we aren't trying to intentionally tell a story. Credibility expresses itself in-between the lines of our mission narratives. Obtaining credibility is one thing. Projecting it authentically is another. A church's credibility speaks louder than words.

"Preach the good news. If you must, use words." - St. Francis of Assisi

Congregational Credibility in Practice. How would you describe the internal pulse of your church? What is the level of satisfaction experienced by those individuals who are gathered and sent every week? What is the energy level of your leaders? What are the forces that motivates your behaviors, informs your decisions, and is reflected in your worship and mission? In thinking deeply about your responses to these kinds of questions, consider how your internal assessment matches the perception of others. Learning from the continuities and

discontinuities in your character story can improve your church's credibility in its mission.

Act Three: Logos

The Greeks highly valued logic, but their word *logos* was much more than connecting the dots and completing a thought. It represented the essence of one's identity that pointed to a future destination or outcome. The logos of a church represents its purpose and gives evidence of its direction. Understanding is important, and credibility is essential, but when a church demonstrates logos, it has a meaningful, aspirational, relevant, direction. Your church's logos addresses the *Why?* of your church. In the incarnation, God's logos, essence of intention, was incarnated (enfleshed) into our neighborhood for a particular purpose. God's story took up residence to accomplish something. The incarnation was not a travel destination to our planet, but a relevant destination to redeem our planet.

"We should try to be the parents of our future rather than the offspring of our past." -Miguel de Unamuno

Congregational Logos in Practice. Why do you go to church? It may seem like an odd question to ask, but when you consider the energy invested into your ministry, and its outcomes, its important to connect the dots, and not just passively observe where they may be leading, but intentionally connecting and reconnecting dots so that your ministry achieves its unique purpose. Why is your building on the corner? What does your budget reveal about what matters to you? Considering your responses to *logos* questions can help you connect the dots pointing to your preferred future.

Please ask me about resources have been recently offered to help your church develop **empathy**, earn **credibility**, and express a relevant **logos** story.

I am grateful for **your** powerful stories told every day by ministers, sessions, and congregations: A sight to take your breath away! Grand processions of people telling all the good things of God!

Sincerely, Kevin

Dr. Kevin Yoho, General Presbyter



GP Proclamation

04.17 Board of Pensions, Regional Benefits Consultation, Philadelphia

04.24-26 Synod Collegium, Stony Point, NY
05.30 Stated Meeting, Pleasantdale

5.18 Realizing the Dream- 50 Years After, Verona
5.18 Tea with a Twist, Prospect

5.19 135th Anniversary, Pleasantdale
5.20 Installation, Dr. Glen Misick, Old First

6.2 10th Anniversary, First Hispanic
6.6-9 *Study leave*, San Francisco
6.15-23 *Vacation*