

## History-Sharing in Transition

**History is a vision of God's creation on the move.**

*Arnold J. Toynbee*



### **Purpose**

To reflect on the history of the congregation and identify how it has responded to God's call throughout its life.

### **Theological Understanding**

Scripture tells us over and over the importance of knowing and sharing the story of being a people of faith. Through the telling of these stories we help others understand how we are connected to God and learn about the faith journeys that brought each of us where we are today. In the sharing, the Holy Spirit will reveal more to us both.

**Note:** *An outside facilitator is needed for this session, and some pre-work must be done by a congregational planning team. The content, however, comes from the participants themselves.*

### **Prior to Session**

**Appoint a congregational planning team:** The team will create the basic timelines, plan and advertise the meeting, arrange for food or refreshments, etc.

**Create the timelines:** Using a large roll of butcher paper at least 2' wide (available at office supply and art stores):

- Cut three equal lengths of paper, each a minimum of 9' and up to 24' long.
- On each length of paper, draw a line lengthwise across the middle, creating a timeline that covers the lifetime of the congregation from its founding. On each of the three timelines, put the founding date of the congregation at the far left and the current year at the far right.
- Divide the timelines into two segments, using 2/3 of the length for the last 50 years. Mark the decades for the last 50 years. Each timeline should have the dates spaced in the same way – they look something like this:

1890	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
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- Label one timeline “*Name of Your Congregation’s History.*”
- Label one of the timelines “City/Community History.” The third should be labeled “World History.”
- If you wish you may add some key dates to these timelines, but leave them mostly blank to be filled in by participants.
- In the meeting room, post each of the timelines on different walls with the congregational one at the front of the room. If you do not have sufficient wall space use sheets of foam board taped together and either placed across several easels or made into a stand-up “wall” (six sheets will create a 24’x8’ wall – tape them accordion style with the tape on alternating sides so you can fold them up and reuse them – the timelines can be attached to the foam board with push pins or masking tape).

If you want to include some dates on the timelines you can find information on key historical events on the following websites.

- For general history timelines, check [www.factmonster.com/spot/timelinearchive.html](http://www.factmonster.com/spot/timelinearchive.html).
- There is a very generic world timeline at [www.timelineindex.com](http://www.timelineindex.com).
- Although designed for individuals, you can enter a beginning and ending date covering a span of up to 140 years at [www.ourtimelines.com](http://www.ourtimelines.com) and get a timeline with events (mostly from the US) and key historical figures that track with each year of your congregation’s life.
- For Anglican Church dates up to 1998, go to <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/timeline>.
- For dates relative to your diocese or city, look for local history books or for historical information posted on the diocesan or local historical society websites.

If there are photos of previous rectors or of key events in your congregational archives, and your timeline is large enough, you can add copies to the timeline (do not use the originals as they might get damaged).

**Pick a time and format for the session:** Allow 3 hours for the program – and plan the session around a meal if at all possible (the annual “coming home” fall dinner, a Saturday morning followed by lunch, a Friday evening potluck, etc. – whatever works for your congregation).

**Find a facilitator:** Your congregation’s search consultant or other congregational consultant; the rector of a nearby congregation (especially someone who has been through **Fresh Start** and has participated in a history-sharing exercise) are all good possibilities.

**Invite the congregation:** Invite everyone (be sure and arrange child care if needed). If there are homebound members, interview them in advance to get their stories to share at the session. If there are former members nearby who

have knowledge of the congregation's history, invite them back to share their memories. Specifically encourage attendance and participation by members who have extensive knowledge of the congregation's history, perhaps asking them to be part of a panel (work out design with your facilitator).

**Copy handouts and gather supplies:** You will need sufficient copies of Handout 1 for every participant, several sets of Handouts 2-4, markers that will not bleed through the timeline charts, pencils or pens for participants to use in completing Handout 1.

### **At the Session**

**Post the timelines on a wall where people can add to them:** Be sure you have markers that will not bleed through the paper! As people enter, ask them to put their name by the date when they joined the congregation. Arrange chairs so that people can see the timelines.

### **Agenda (suggested times shown in parentheses):**

1. Opening meditation or worship (10 minutes): Suggested reading – Genesis 50:22-26 and Exodus 13:17-19.
2. Individual history reflection (20 minutes): Give participants the handout and ask them to complete. (See Guidance for Facilitators.)
3. Small group story development (20 minutes): Divide the group into at least three subgroups of no more than 7 people per group. Move timelines to one wall, one above the other with the Congregational Timeline in the middle. (See Guidance for Facilitators.)
4. Break (10 minutes)
5. Sharing of stories (30 minutes): Small groups report out.
6. History of the congregation (30 minutes): facilitated discussion with people sharing their memories and stories about the congregation and its past. Another option is to plan a series of panels of key congregants by decade to share their stories – with questions and comments coming from the rest of the people gathered. (See Guidance for Facilitators.)
7. Wrap up and closing prayer (5 minutes)

**Note:** *There are other models for conducting a history-sharing exercise. Your facilitator may have other ideas for you.*

## Guidance for Facilitators

### Talking Points and *Instructions*

**History is a vision of God's creation on the move.**

*Arnold J. Toynbee*

#### **Introduction**

Our time today is to reflect on what Toynbee calls “a vision of God’s creation on the move” – to get to know each other better through our own histories, the history of this congregation and the world around it.

There are three timelines posted around the room. The one in front is for this congregation with a few key dates already placed on it. The other two are labeled “City/Community Timeline” and “World Timeline.”

*Write the Toynbee quote above on a flip chart.*

*As people arrive, have them write their name on the “Congregation’s Timeline” chart by the date when they first became a part of the congregation.*

**Note:** *The timelines need to be set up so that people can easily get to them and add events. See the instructions in the resource section for more details.*

*One of the timelines is always labeled with the name of the congregation, another “City/Community” and the third “World.” A fourth timeline may be added depending upon the circumstances of the congregation – see resource section for options.*

**Distribute Handout 1** – *Be sure and have pencils or pens on hand!*

Take a few minutes to think about your own life. On the handout I have just given you, draw your own life's timeline, noting the milestones or events in the world that have been important to you or that you feel are important to society as a whole, as well as those from your city or community's history and the history of your congregation. Jot these down on the handout, and when you are ready write the milestones you have identified on the appropriate timeline using a marker so what you add can be easily seen.

### **Finding the Stories**

Each of these timelines has a story to tell – and each is influenced by the stories of the other two. Using the questions in your handout find the story that the timeline your group has been assigned has to tell. Look at the other timelines as well – how do the stories intersect or influence each other? Be prepared to tell your story to the larger group.

*World milestones go on the "World" timeline, etc.*

*When everyone has posted their events on the three timelines, divide participants into three or more groups.*

*Assign one group the "City/Community Timeline" (Handout 2), the second group the "World Timeline" (Handout 3), and the third group the "Congregation's Timeline" (Handout 4). These groups may be as small as two (2) but no larger than seven (7). If you have more than three groups, assign each timeline to more than one group. Reposition the three timelines so that they are on one wall, if at all possible directly above one another with the congregation's in the middle.*

<p>What stories have you found in the timelines? As you listen to each story, feel free to chime in with your own observations and sense of meaning.</p> <p><b><u>Congregational History</u></b></p> <p>I'd like to add to the history of this congregation to give you some more background on where it has been and what it carries forward from that past.</p>	<p><i>After the groups have had time to develop the stories, ask them to report out starting with the "World Timeline" group, then moving to the "City/Community Timeline," and finally the "Congregation's Timeline."</i></p> <p><i>Facilitate cross-conversation and observations among the various groups as the presentations are being made.</i></p> <p><i>Fill in the history of the congregation at this point – either by asking people to share their memories or by having a series of speakers/panels representing different eras in the life of the congregation. Be sure the following are addressed:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. How long has the congregation been in existence? If new, where did the people come from and where were they worshipping before? What was the founding era like?</i></li> <li><i>2. When were the "glory days" and why are they considered that?</i></li> <li><i>3. Are there major internal events – a disastrous fire, dissolution of pastoral relationships, fraud – that people still point to? Who are the heroes/heroines? The "villains" of their history?</i></li> <li><i>4. What impact did outside events (i.e., in the diocese, US, Anglican Church, perhaps the world) have on the congregation and its history?</i></li> </ol>
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	<p><i>5. What about the present – what’s the same and what’s different from previous eras? How are external events impacting the congregation as a whole? What Bible story is the congregation living now?</i></p> <p><i>6. What are “Joseph’s bones” for this congregation?</i></p> <p><i>Ask for any final reflections or observations from the participants.</i></p> <p><i>End the session with a prayer, poem or appropriate reading.</i></p>
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## History-Sharing in Transition Handout 1

1. Draw your personal timeline, noting major events or milestones in world or national affairs that have influenced you.
2. Now think of the city/community in which this congregation is located. What are some major events or milestones in the city/community's history? Jot them down by date below.
3. What major events or milestones are you aware of in the life of this congregation? Jot them down by date below.

*When you have answered all three questions, take your paper and enter your answers on the appropriate timeline (e.g., world and national milestones on the "World Timeline," congregation's milestones on the "Congregational Timeline").*





## History – Sharing in Transition Handout 2

### The Story Told by the City/Community Timeline

#### **Purpose**

To identify and interpret trends, themes and patterns important to us and establish a context for our life together.

As a group use the City/Community Timeline to tell us a story about its history. In crafting your story, take into account:

1. How these events were impacted by or intersected with events on the World Timeline;
2. How these events impacted or intersected with the events on the Congregation's Timeline;
3. What are the “Joseph’s bones” from the City/Community’s history that continue to be carried by the congregation; and
4. What are the implications of the City/Community story for the congregation?

Looking across the timelines, what patterns do you see?

***Be prepared to share your observations with the rest of the group.***

# History-Sharing in Transition

## Handout 3

### The Story Told by the World Timeline

#### Purpose

To identify and interpret the trends, themes and patterns important to us and establish a context for our life together.

As a group use the World Timeline to tell us a story about our society as a whole. In crafting your story, take into account:

1. How these events impacted or intersected with events on the City/Community Timeline;
2. How these events impacted or intersected with events on the Congregational Timeline;
3. What are the “Joseph’s bones” from the World’s history that continue to be carried by the congregation; and
4. What are the implications of the World story for the congregation?

Looking across the timelines, what patterns do you see?

***Be prepared to share your observations with the rest of the group.***

# History – Sharing and Understanding

## Handout 4

### The Story Told by the Congregational Timeline

#### **Purpose**

To identify and interpret the trends, themes and patterns important to us and establish a context for our life together.

As a group use the Congregational Timeline to tell us a story about our congregation. In crafting your story, take into account:

1. How these events relate to events on the World Timeline;
2. How these events relate to events on the City/Community Timeline;
3. What are those things from its past that the congregation is carrying forward today (its “Joseph’s bones”); and
4. What are the implications of the congregational story for our ministry today?

Looking across the timelines, what patterns do you see?

***Be prepared to share your observations with the rest of the group.***