Sharing Faith Dinners
How to Organization and Carry Out Sharing Faith Events
within the Diocese of Kentucky

Faith Sharing Dinners
Sharing Faith dinners provide an opportunity to gather around a meal to participate in life together. At each dinner a moderator will prompt participants to share stories of faith with printed questions. These Sharing Faith dinners invite people into a safe and welcoming space to share stories of life and faith, as well as build relationships.

When? Host a dinner anytime between Sep. 14th (Holy Cross Day) and Sep. 30th

How? All the organization details are contained within this PDF file. The deck(s) of cards will be mailed to you in August as they become available. Please email Canon Jason Lewis (jason@episcopalky.org) with any questions as you organize these events within our diocese.

These resources are based upon program materials from the Diocese of Texas. Everything you need is included herein; however, in addition to this handbook, you might find the resources and videos there helpful in preparing your event: http://www.sharingfaithdinners.com/

Key Roles and Responsibilities

Coordinators

Coordinators identify hosts and moderators and keep the congregation up to date on any news or info. They assist participants in signing up for a dinner in their neighborhood.

(1) PUBLICIZE AND COMMUNICATE ALL INFORMATION TO CHURCH MEMBERS IN YOUR CONGREGATION. INVITE EVERY MEMBER’S PARTICIPATION.
(2) CREATE SIGN UP/REGISTRATION PROCESS FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE SHARING FAITH EVENTS.
(3) ORGANIZE THE SELECTION OF HOSTS AND MODERATORS WITH YOUR LOCAL CLERGY PERSON AND ENSURE THEY RECEIVE TRAINING.
(4) SIGN UP PARTICIPANTS.
**Moderator**

A Moderator guides the Sharing Faith question/answer time and helps to facilitate a welcoming and listening atmosphere for participants.

1. THE MODERATOR’S ROLE IS TO CREATE AND MAINTAIN A SAFE, TRUSTING, AND PRAYERFUL SPACE SO PEOPLE CAN SHARE THEIR FAITH STORIES.
2. MANAGE THE EVENT AND SET EXPECTATIONS FOR FAITH SHARING.
3. GUIDE TWO ROUNDS OF STORYTELLING.

**Hosts**

Hosts welcome participants into their space and provide a simple meal and help the night run smoothly.

1. PROVIDE THE LOCATION (HOME, CHURCH, MEETING SPACE).
2. PROVIDE A SIMPLE MEAL FOR YOURSELF, THE MODERATOR AND UP TO 12 PARTICIPANTS.
3. INVITE PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE AT YOUR HOME.
4. COMMUNICATE BY EMAIL OR PHONE WITH COORDINATOR FOR GUIDANCE.

Attached you will find handouts for you to share with the various congregants who will be filling each role (yes, these can fill more than one role) and to help you understand the work involved in carrying out Sharing Faith Dinners within your congregation.
SHARING our FAITH: Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities

What are the basic responsibilities of a coordinator?

- Publicize and communicate all information to church members in your congregation. Invite every member's participation.
- Create sign up/registration process for participants in the Sharing our Faith events.
- Organize the selection of hosts and moderators with your local clergy person and ensure they receive training.
- Sign up participants.
- Distribute materials to hosts and/or moderators.
- Troubleshoot any issues to ensure the events are well organized and the environment for each gathering is welcoming and hospitable.

About Sharing Faith

What are the Sharing Faith gatherings? A time of small-group storytelling, beginning with a simple meal, in locations across the diocese, including parishioner homes.

What is the purpose? The gatherings are designed for Episcopalians to come together over a simple meal and get to know each other by sharing faith stories based on questions on story cards. Sharing personal faith stories help us to deepen our own faith, and hearing others' stories of God's presence in their lives brings us into deeper relationship with each other.

When are the dinners? The groups can meet in the daytime or evening; you can expect to schedule a three-hour block of time. In some situations, it may be necessary to pick an alternative date.

Where are the dinners? Can the dinners be at the church? Small groups of 6-10 people gather in homes or other comfortable settings across the diocese, including churches.

Who will attend? All members of any worshiping congregation, along with friends, are encouraged to participate to make this a shared experience.

About Coordinators

Are there promotional materials? Yes, a flyer that can be printed to be used as a bulletin insert or distributed by hand, a poster and an article for your church newsletter/upcoming events email (that can also be used as a verbal announcement) are available on the Sharing Faith site.

How are the groups put together? As coordinator, you will create groups of 8-12 people based on the number of people registered, geography, and any other factors you deem relevant. Participants need not come from a single church. Attendees at a dinner might be members from several Episcopal churches; this is encouraged in areas where churches are located near one another. Friends of parishioners are also welcome - - this program is designed primarily for Episcopalians but can be an opportunity to invite neighbors and friends.

How do participants register? As coordinator, you are responsible for creating registration/sign ups within your congregation. We suggest you use the same system for registration/sign up that your church typically uses for events. Once you have created your system and announced the events, registration should occur between at least a month before the event.
Go Speak: SHARING our FAITH: Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities

How will the Sharing our Faith materials be distributed? Materials for each gathering, including a deck of Sharing our Faith cards and tablecards (printed guidelines for Sharing our Faith), will be mailed to coordinators at their church address the first week of May (one packet for each dinner). Coordinators are responsible for delivering the packets to hosts before the event so they are available for the moderator when he or she arrives for the event.

About Moderators

What is the role of the moderator? The moderator’s role is to create and maintain a safe, trusting, and prayerful space so people can share their faith stories. Major responsibilities include:

a) Manage the event and set expectations for faith sharing.
b) Guide two rounds of storytelling.

There are resources for moderator training available on the web page, Sharing our Faith.

How are moderators selected? Clergy and coordinators identify moderators; you will need one moderator for each group of 6-10 people.

Can a moderator be a priest or deacon? Yes.

How and when will moderators be trained? Three types of moderator training are offered:

About Hosts

How are hosts selected? Coordinators may recruit hosts or interested people may volunteer by contacting their local coordinator.

How many hosts are needed? You will need one host for each group of 6-10 people. You will keep the list of hosts from your congregation.

What is the role of the host?

- Hospitality
- Provide the location (home, church, meeting space)
- Provide a simple meal for themselves, the moderator and 6-10 participants
- Communicate by email or phone with coordinator for guidance.

Can a host be a priest or deacon? Yes.

Can a host also be a moderator? We recommend the host not also take on the role of the moderator. It is best if the host focuses on hospitality and the moderator facilitates the event.

Can the coordinator be a host or a moderator? Yes.
HOST

HANDOUT
SHARING our FAITH: Host Roles and Responsibilities

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MODERATOR

TRAINING

HANDBOOK
MODERATOR TRAINING
SHARING FAITH

Thank you for agreeing to be a moderator at one of the dinner conversations events. You were asked to be a moderator because your particular skills, experience and personal qualities make you a perfect person for this important role in the evening’s events. We so appreciate you saying “yes” to our request. We could not do this project without you. We ask that all moderators arrive at the event 30 minutes prior to participants. This will give you time to become acquainted with your host(s) and to set up for the “Dinner Conversation.”
The purpose of this document is to

- explain the dinner conversations concept and structure
- explain the role of the moderator
- offer a general outline of how the evening can be structured

The Dinner Conversations Concept
Although the term “conversation” is used to describe the activity, it is not a traditional conversation. Rather, it is a guided time of sharing in which people are asked and answer questions in a way that leads to listening and appreciating, rather than to agreeing or disagreeing, liking or not liking what someone says, or comparing or contrasting what’s being said to one’s own personal experience.

The questions do not seek facts and opinions so much as examples, stories, and metaphors from people’s lives that illustrate how God is active and present in their lives.

Goals of the Conversations
- to help participants begin to formulate and articulate their faith stories
- to create a safe environment and encourage people to go deep in their sharing
- to teach neutrality in interpersonal encounters
- to provide the experience of being heard

Instructions for the Conversations
The conversation occurs over dinner – that is, while people are eating. The questions that prompt the sharing are found in a deck of “dialogue cards” specifically created for the Sharing Faith Project.

1. One by one, guests draw a card from the deck, read the question aloud, take 15-20 seconds to think about their answer, and then answer the question in about 5 minutes.
2. Other guests listen to the answer. No one interrupts the person speaking. No questions are to be asked of the person while they are sharing, or before or after their answer (except for “Can you repeat that, I didn’t hear you?”). There is no “back and forth” conversation or commenting at this point in the evening.

Reminder: This is not a typical dialogue or conversation.
3. When one person is finished, the next person draws a card and the process is repeated until everyone has answered a question. No two people get the same question.

The point of the exercise is to keep people at the level of personal experience, feelings and sharing — NOT at the level of perceptions, opinions, beliefs, theories, assessments or
policies. The structure of “no interruptions” and “no commentary” minimizes the human tendency to listen only in order to respond with our own story, belief, experience, or whatever. Instead, people share when it is their turn, and listen the rest of the time with a view toward simply appreciating and truly hearing what others are expressing.

4. After the first round, a break happens — to serve dessert, refill beverages, or to use the restroom. After the break, the moderator may open up another round with the cards during which each participant will draw and respond to another dialogue card.

5. After the “cards period,” the group may engage in a debriefing conversation. The “debrief conversation” occurs sequentially as well – just like the cards conversation. One at a time, participants share what they learned as they listened to people, their experience of listening, any “ah ha” moments, how this will affect them now, etc. Again, no interruptions or commentary. Sequential sharing lasts only 3-5 minutes each.

6. If there is remaining time, the moderator makes the transition to the “free period” in which people are free to visit, share and converse with each other in an unstructured way. During this time, people have the back and forth conversations that were prohibited during the exercise. Often, people will exchange information because they want to get together again at a future time. This free period can take place around the dinner table or in smaller groups — you should guide this process so that this time is best utilized.

7. At 9:25 p.m., the moderator brings people back together to thank the host/hostess and participants and conclude the evening. Everyone should depart by no later than 9:30 p.m.

ROLE OF THE MODERATOR

Moderator Do’s

The moderator’s function during the evening is to

1. Create the context for the evening that provides a safe environment where deep sharing and neutral listening can take place

2. Manage or “run” the evening — i.e. introduce yourself, the hosts, others as people arrive; ask people to be seated; explain the evening’s schedule; etc.

3. Guide the conversation — i.e., maintain the structure, remind people not to interrupt, assist people who “get stuck” with a question, keep people on track, monitor the time

Creating the Context — This is done by being open and welcoming in your demeanor, thanking people for coming, creating a comfortable space in which participants can share their personal experiences in the company of others, and being energetic and excited in your overall presentation. This is also done by your explanation of the guidelines — i.e., that we are sharing our faith experiences, learning about each other, expressing from our hearts, and learning to listen without judgment
*Moderators should maintain an atmosphere of calmness throughout the evening so that participants are able to comfortably and safely share their faith experiences and listen openly to those of others.

Managing the Evening – This is done by keeping track of the time, working with the host to make sure food is out and ready for quick, easy service, communicating effectively with the group to get them seated and ready for conversation, explaining the guidelines, discerning the groups’ energy and interest levels, and keeping the whole event on schedule.

Guiding the Conversation – This is perhaps the most vital part. Moderators are NOT participants; that is, moderators are not sharing from their own life, faith, experiences, etc. Moderators make sure the conversation keeps flowing and is consistent with the guidelines and overall structure. This includes the following:

- Asking who wants to be first or assigning someone if no one volunteers
- Asking a prompt question if someone becomes “stuck” – i.e., “What exactly do you find difficult about the question?” or “How exactly does that question seem odd to you?” Often, in answering such prompt questions, participants will actually answer the dialogue card question that they “found odd” or “got stuck on”. If the responder gives a less than detailed response, you might ask: “Is that all you want to share?” Or “Is there anything else?”
- Gently reminding people to stay experience and feeling oriented if they stray into expressing opinions, theories or speechmaking. You and only you can interrupt people to do this (Other participants cannot interrupt.)
- Monitoring the time. You may allow people up to 7 minutes to share (but don’t tell them this – tell them 5) Remind people of the time indirectly by looking at your watch or directly by telling them they don’t have much time left.
- Allowing silence for a bit longer than is normally comfortable. This is part of “holding the space,” which addresses the human tendency to fill silent gaps by vocalizing our own internal chatter instead of just being still and letting people take their time to express things.

Moderator Don’ts

Moderators should avoid

1. Sharing from their own experiences or feelings as if they were participants
2. Commenting on people’s answers or asking them questions about their responses. Although moderators can interrupt participants to alert them to time, to ask them to repeat something if it was too soft, or for a few specified other reasons, this is not a license to break the structural agreements of the conversation.

With all this said: In some instances, at the end of the evening the participants would like to hear from the Moderator. If you are requested to make any statement, you
may pick a card and give an answer, or just give some reflections from your
vantage point. **The key here is to respond to the needs of your group. We ask
that you refrain from making comments until the end of the evening, after the "safe
space" has been created.** The goal of the discussion is respectful listening and
engagement. If you are able to share and maintain this atmosphere, then you are free to
answer questions. Thank you!

**OUTLINE FOR THE EVENING:**
Here is a general timeline for the events of the evening. This is not fixed, but will
be helpful to make sure all the elements of the evening are included.

6:00-6:30 Moderator arrives early and sets out name tags.
6:30-6:45 Participants arrive, greet each other, and make nametags.
6:45-6:55 Moderator opens with a prayer to bless the meal and the conversations. People
serve themselves, get seated and begin eating.
6:55-7:30 While dinner is eaten, Moderator explains the conversation guidelines, structure,
for the evening.
7:30-8:10 First round of questions
8:10-8:20 Break/transition – dessert, beverage refills, bathroom
8:20-9:00 Second round of questions
9:00-9:20 Conversation or free period for unstructured visiting, sharing
9: 20-9:30 Gather participants for concluding thank you and prayer; hand out
evaluation information
9:30 All depart.

**Note ** If you have 7-8 people you are welcome to spend more time sharing.
Just make certain that every participant has the opportunity to speak.

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**Host Information**
Your Dinner Coordinator will let you know the name(s) and address of the host(s). We ask that
you call your host before the evening to arrange your arrival time and confirm the home
location.

A **Moderator Packet** containing the dialogue cards, nametags, and a sharpie will be sent
to your Dinner Coordinator, who will arrange for them to be at your host’s home at your
arrival.

Again, thank you for joining this project as a moderator. We are very
excited about the Sharing Faith Dinners and the positive impact they
have already had in our churches and throughout the Diocese.
FAQ

FOR COORDINATORS
AND MODERATORS
During the first few years of Sharing Faith, we received feedback that there are a few questions either not addressed in the moderator or coordinator training documents or needing further clarification. Here are those questions with some answers/suggestions for each.

ASSIGNING AND CREATING GROUPS FOR Sharing Faith (FOR COORDINATORS AND MODERATORS)

What are some suggestions for creating groups?
Several approaches can work:

• Put groups together by geography: One benefit to this approach is the creation of intergenerational groups of people who live near one another. In addition, participants may develop new relationships with neighbors as a result of hearing one another’s stories.

• Groups that are already constituted: This approach can help deepen the relationships of people who share a common interest at your congregation. They may also have a set meeting time. It could create greater commitment to participate if they can take advantage of such a time.

• Generational groups: There can be an advantage to thinking about creating groups by generation. Talk with your clergy about this possibility; they will know whether this is the best approach for your congregation. Think carefully about intergenerational groups, too.

• Mix newcomers with established members of your church community: This approach can help incorporate new people and give them insight to the community as well as increase their sense of belonging.

Who can participate?
This activity of sharing our faith is appropriate for all adults and mature teens, approximately 15 years of age and older. Use your discretion when including teens in groups with adults.

Another possibility is for youth groups to follow this process. The questions have been vetted and are completely appropriate for this type of gathering.

This process is not conducive for a much younger group. If people who are participating have younger children, consider offering child care.

Should we invite our clergy to participate?
By all means! We all have faith stories to tell and in this, we are all equal. We encourage you to invite your clergy to be part of this effort.

What about locations? Are there other suggested places beside homes?
Indeed. Feel free to have groups meet at your church, or a meeting room at a convenient business (e.g., at a Starbuck’s or local restaurant).

There is one important consideration: If you are meeting at your church, be sure to separate groups from one another so there are no distractions between groups. If you are meeting at a public place, find one that has an enclosed meeting room that can be reserved. Above all, it is essential that each group feel safe to share their stories without someone outside the group overhearing them.
FAQ for Sharing Faith

Further Explanation of the Guidelines for Sharing Faith

Why is there an emphasis on silence?
First, sharing faith is an opportunity to tell our stories of God in our lives; it is not a conversation or a prepared speech.

In order to create a safe space for storytelling, we need silence. It is truly a gift to one another to let a story be the story without comment or interruption. Silence gives the time and space for the storyteller to think and offers a sense that our story is not only listened to, but really heard.

Why is silence so important?
Sharing Faith is a storytelling experience. We each have our own stories to tell of how God is active and present in our lives. Thus, listening is as much a part of this experience as speaking. As Bishop Anne wrote recently, "the even bigger blessing will be hearing someone else's story. You never know; the story you share may be the story someone else most needs to hear!" Silence before, during and after a story is told ensures that it is heard and savored.

As moderators, what are some things we can say to help the group “hold the silence”?
There are a few things you can do:
• Set the expectation up front that silence is essential. Give the reasons why.
• Remind people that in our ordinary interactions we do not have much silence and thus, we tend to feel uncomfortable with it.
• Tell people that by experiencing the gift silence can be, many people will develop a comfort level with it and be able to use it in other situations.

What are some things we might do to facilitate holding the silence?
• While there are few rules in this experience of sharing faith, holding the silence before, during and after a story is told is the primary one.
• One way to facilitate the silence is to ask the person telling his story to, in effect, control it. Once the card is in his hands and until after he tells his story, he determines the amount of silence that feels right to him. When he decides he has held it sufficiently, he can say something like, "Who would like to tell their story now?"
• One caution: Try not to be too quick to ask the next person to select a card. You might give a guideline: for example, “take three deep breaths before handing the cards to the next person,” or, “say a silent prayer in gratitude for the story you have just told/heard.”
FAQ for Sharing Faith

What if something out of the ordinary happens? How do I handle it?

What if someone wants to tell a story that goes on more than 5 minutes?
At the beginning, set the expectation that you will give each person a sign when he or she has one minute left to tell his or her story. Remind everyone that by doing this, you are respecting each person's story equally. As moderator, you are the only one who will give this signal.

What if someone does not want to participate?
First, every person will select her own card. This ensures each person decides what story to share. No one else can tell another's story.

If a person decides she cannot tell a story at that moment, she can pass until later in the round. Once she hears others' stories, it is likely she will feel more comfortable and willing to tell one of her own. If this is still not the case and she continues to be reluctant, let it go.

What if someone tells a story and there is a need for pastoral followup?
Do not interrupt or comment on the story when the person is finished. Let the story be told like all others. After the group has finished and if there is some fellowship time, approach the person privately and encourage him to talk with a clergy person or trusted advisor.

Do not try to respond to the situation yourself. Similar to holding the silence, the person gives voice to his own story, and it is his responsibility to decide how to proceed to address the situation. If the story includes any kind of misconduct within the church, please contact your local Diocese.

What if a teenager under 18 years of age tells a story that includes an incident of physical or mental abuse?
We are required by law to report any occasions of physical or mental abuse of a minor child. You must make it clear in a group that includes teenagers that you are required to report any story of this nature.
Opening Words and Prayer for Sharing Faith Dinners
Adapted for use within the Diocese of Kentucky and surrounding region.

As the group gathers at the beginning of the evening, a moderator reads the following words.

Tonight we gather as God's holy people to share our faith stories, and to listen to the faith stories of others. We gather to lose ourselves in awe and wonder at how God has been at work in all of our lives. Our stories are different, but the God that infuses each story and life is the same. We have stories of triumph and defeat, success and failure, joy and uncertainty. Tonight we gather to share these stories because we believe that God's Holy Spirit is the common thread that weaves them all together.

We do not gather as isolated individuals, but as part of a larger Anglican and Episcopal Body committed to sharing our faith story with the world. Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby recently called for a great wave of prayer so that the Church of England might be emboldened to share their faith stories with one another. Similarly, the Diocese of Wales has an initiative called "The Gospel according to everyone," to encourage church members to share the story of how God has been at work in their lives.

Tonight, our table is sacred ground as we join others across the country and the world in holy listening. Tonight we gather as a small group, but we are not alone. We are joined by people throughout the Diocese of Kentucky and fellow Episcopalians across our region.

It is therefore fitting to begin tonight's Sharing Faith dinner with a prayer: for the larger body of Christ seeking to share their faith story with the world, for courage as we seek to share our own story of faith, and for humility as we listen to the faith stories of other people.

Let us pray:

We give thanks to you, O Lord our God, for all your servants and witnesses seeking to share their faith story with the world so that all might come to know that your saving embrace includes us all. Inspire in each one of us courage to bear witness to God's presence in our lives, as well as humility and openness as we listen to how your hand has been at work in the lives of others. We pray not just for ourselves, but for all those gathering at a Sharing Faith dinner throughout the diocese and the wider church. We acknowledge that we are part of a larger Body, and that our well-being is tied to the well-being of others. We ask your blessing upon tonight's gathering. Give us ears to hear how you have been at work in the stories of others, and open our mouth to bear witness to our own sacred story. All this we ask in the name of Jesus our Lord. AMEN.