



**THIS IS MY STORY, THIS IS MY SONG!**  
**Celebrating the Faith Journeys of Senior Adults**  
**Ideas for Engaging Senior Adults in Sharing Their Faith Stories**

By Frank Ward

**Purpose:** To celebrate the gifts of senior adult members of the congregation and to engage them in sharing their faith stories as a means of enriching the lives of others whose faith journeys are not yet as long.

**For Leaders/Planners:**

- According to the denominational calendar, Senior Adult Sunday is the second Sunday in September. However, you can set aside any time to celebrate the senior adults in your congregation.
- Make plans to have senior adults share stories of their faith with other members of your congregation.
  - On Senior Adult Sunday during worship
  - As part of a special celebration and recognition of senior adults on Senior Adult Sunday. Try a THEN AND NOW approach at a church-wide luncheon to honor senior adults. Have the seniors tell what the world and church was like when they were young as compared to now.
  - During a 1½ hour event on Sunday evening where senior adults share something about their faith journey in small groups with others.
- Resist asking senior adults to tell their faith stories in general; make it theme oriented. For example, invite them to share a time when their faith helped them through a difficult situation or tell about their baptism and ways in which the church has helped them to live out their faith.
- Meet in advance with the specific senior adults you will be inviting to speak to orient them to the purpose and expectation. Seek to encourage them and lessen any anxiety they may be feeling about the experience.

- If you plan an intergenerational event, process the design as closely to the time schedule as possible. (See the 1½ -hour design below.) Adjust the times to accommodate your congregation's needs by expanding or reducing the suggestions in the design.

**Introduction:** (Leader may share part or all of the information below as an introduction to senior storytelling in worship or the 1½-hour gathering/celebration.)

The movie *Places in the Heart* intertwines the stories of people who live in a small Texas town during the 1950s. There is the sheriff who is accidentally killed by a young Black man's gunshot; a lynching by the KKK; a beating of the sheriff's widow's hired hands on her farm; the adulterous affair that threatened a marriage, and more. Near the end of the movie, the camera pans around the outside of a wood frame church building in which so many broken people are gathered (living and dead) to celebrate The Lord's Supper. As the camera pans, the music from inside can be heard: "This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior, all the day long..." So it is; we all have stories to tell. Many of them are about our own struggles and our own faith journeys.

In his memoir *Telling Secrets*, Frederick Buechner states:

"My story is important not because it is mine, God knows, but because if I tell it anything like right, the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is also yours... it is precisely through these stories in all their particularity, as I have long believed and often said, that God makes himself known to each of us more powerfully and personally. If this is true, it means that to lose track of our stories is to be profoundly impoverished not only humanly but also spiritually."

### **For Worship or Other Total Group Settings:**

Select specific senior adults to speak. Remind them that the Bible is a book of stories, specifically stories about God's mighty acts in human history. It contains stories about a burning bush, a young boy with a slingshot slaying a giant, a people moving from bondage to freedom, a woman washing the Lord's feet with precious ointment and wiping them with her hair, a man feeding 5,000 plus people with some bread and fish, a Son dying to resurrect and reconcile the world, and on and on. But God's story didn't end with the written Word—the Bible. God's story continues in the lives of ordinary people like you and me. And so, we are made better and our faith grows by hearing and entering into the stories of others. That's one reason it is important to tell and hear faith stories. (You may wish to share something from the "Introduction" above.) Depending on the occasion, assign a topic or question from the list below or others you may identify. It is easier for persons to address a specific topic than a more general one that can be overwhelming such as "Tell us your faith story." Inform the person about when the storytelling time will be and how much time they will have to share. Tell them what the purpose is for their story sharing.

Some potential topics/questions to consider:

- Share a time in your life when God seemed especially near.
- Describe your baptism and how you came to your decision to profess faith in Jesus.
- Tell about a difficult time in your life when your faith helped to see you through.

- What is one of your favorite scriptures and how has it helped you live out your faith?
- Identify a time when you saw the church at its very best.
- What are some things about life that you feel you've learned on your faith journey?
- Share a time when the church ministered to you and your family.
- What three pieces of advice would you give to young Christians today?
- What role, if any, has doubt played in your faith journey?
- If you had it to do over again, what three things would you do differently?
- If you were to tell your faith story, what would be some of the chapter titles?
- What part has the church played in your religious journey?
- What is the most challenging thing about being a Christian in the world today?
- If you were drawing a faith line from the beginning of your life to now, where would be the high points in your faith and where would be the low points (those times that were especially difficult/challenging)?

### **Design for a 1½ -hour Senior Adult Celebration**

1. **Preparation.** Before the event gather some pictures of the senior adults in your church when they were younger. Post these at various places around the gathering area. You might display baby or childhood pictures of these people on one wall and have persons guess the identity. Or, you could scan the pictures electronically and project them one at a time on the screen and have persons guess the identity of each person. Set up the area so persons can gather in small groups. Have a meal or snacks prepared to serve during the last half hour of your time together.
2. **Introduction.** (7 minutes) Inform the group that the purpose for this celebration is to hear stories of faith from those whose life experience spans more than a few years. Share something about the importance of storytelling from the "Introduction" above to set the stage. Sing "Blessed Assurance" and pray a prayer of blessing and gratitude to God for this occasion and for the lives of the senior adults among your group.
3. **Getting Started.** (23 minutes—3 minutes allowed for groups to form each time). Invite everyone to stand and find a partner who is from a different generation than their own. Give persons time to find a partner. (It's okay if three people join together, but no more). Tell persons that you will be giving them an assignment and that persons have the right to pass if they can't think of something or don't have a response. Have persons share with their partners a description of the house in which they lived when they were 6 years old. (If younger children are involved, they can describe their house now.). Allow no more than four minutes. Invite these partners to find another team of partners to form a group of four; inform them that they must have at least one senior adult (60 or older) in their group of four. Allow time for persons to group quickly. Ask persons to identify their favorite Bible story and tell why it's especially meaningful to them. Allow no more than eight minutes. Call time and instruct persons to tell about their baptism. (Invite persons who have not been

baptized to tell about a baptism they experienced that was particularly meaningful.) Allow eight minutes. Call time and tell the groups of four to find seats together.

4. **Faith Sharing.** (5 minutes) Have a couple of senior adults selected to respond to the question: What makes this church special for you? (Limit responses to no more than 2.5 minutes.)
5. **Focus on Faith Stories of Senior Adults.** (20 minutes) Instruct persons to return to their group of four and form a circle with their chairs, separating their group from the others in order to reduce the possibility of groups disturbing one another. Tell the groups that the purpose of this time is for the senior adults of their group (60 or older or whatever) to share something about their faith journey with the group. It's a time for other group members to listen and learn. It's a time for senior adults to reflect on their faith and respond to directed questions or assignments. Ask group members to honor the sharing of the senior member; let them know that they will have time later to ask questions. (*Note: Hopefully each group of four has only one senior adult. If that is not the case, shift some group members to ensure that each has at least one senior adult.*) Ask the following questions one at a time, providing time (approximately 3 minutes) after each for the senior adult to share his or her response with his or her group.

**Questions:** (Give each group a copy of the questions or post them so that all of the groups can see them for reference.)

- \* What is a key ingredient of your faith?
  - \* What person has been important in your faith development?
  - \* What action have you taken because of your faith in God?
  - \* Name one thing that sometimes gets in the way of you living out your faith.
  - \* When has your faith been tested the most?
  - \* What three words best describe your faith?
6. **Snacks/M meal and Sharing.** (32 minutes) Have the senior adults in the group to each find a separate table in so much as its possible to do so. (It may be that some tables will have more than one senior adult. If persons need to go through a line to pick up food, let the senior adults go first and then find their tables.) Invite persons to get their food (if it is not already on the tables) and find a table with a senior adult. Tell them to try to mix the generations as best they can. Allow ten minutes to secure food and form table groups. Inform persons that during this time of eating and fellowship they have the privilege of interviewing the senior member and asking questions. The senior member can pass if he or she wishes. Allow time for eating and sharing. Stop the groups three minutes before concluding the event. Persons can remain where they are; refrain from cleaning up until after the closing.
  7. **Closing.** (3 minutes) Express gratitude to persons for coming and invite persons to applaud the senior adults among them. Remind persons again of the importance of sharing faith stories and encourage them to continue to do so as they have opportunity in the coming days. Pray a prayer of gratitude for the food provided and eaten and invite God's blessings on persons as they depart.

