



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM
OFFICE *for* MISSION
“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”



WRITING ABOUT YOUR FAITH JOURNEY

Personal testimonies, as they are often called, can be an important factor in individuals coming to know Christ and how He uses and blesses individuals. They may also be of use for those who are trying to follow Christ or to discern God at work in their lives.

We have provided the following suggestions and form for you to write your story and we pray that you will receive God's blessings in writing it, as others will through reading it.

Before you start take time to still yourself and ask the Holy Spirit to gently lead you down memory lane to see where God has helped you over the years. Using the following outline, reflect upon your own faith story and pick out significant stages in your life from childhood to present. We suggest that you keep your writing to no more than 500 words.

Select *one significant event* and reflect on the change God brought about in your life. Consider the following possibilities (From → To) :-

Fear → Courage

Hatred → Love

Weakness → Strength

Despair → Hope

Sickness → Health

Anxiety → Peace

Aimlessness → Purpose

Loneliness → Community

Arrange into three parts (beginning, middle & end):-

Please do: Trust God, be natural and yourself, speak of relationships, share positive benefits, use language that will relate to others, beware of jargon and be interesting, *but...*

Please do not: Preach or lecture, generalize all is perfect, give travelogues, get too bogged down with detail, speak negatively, labour past sins or exaggerate.

Top Ten Tips for sharing your faith journey – Speaking about faith, in your own words.

1) Become increasingly aware of ‘moments of encounter’ with God

We know that God is with us, but how often do we pause in the day to actively become aware of God's closeness? Some people have dramatic stories of personal conversion, but, for most of us, God is present in the ordinariness of our daily lives; Such as an answered prayer, or experiencing a moment of peace in the midst of anxiety. God speaks to us through a timely word of wisdom, or encouragement, from a loved one, or through the sacraments of the Church. It may help to keep a prayer journal and at the end of each day to write a few lines about how you encountered God throughout that day.

2) Be open to the Holy Spirit

We can pray each morning for an opportunity to share our faith with someone in the day ahead. Pray also, that in that moment you'll be given the right words to speak. Through prayer, when we are talking with someone, we may feel a prompting from the Holy Spirit to

share a particular part of our story at a particular time. It is amazing what the Holy Spirit can bring to mind, that can be of great help to someone.

3) Consider who you are speaking to and use simple words

Are they a Christian, or a Catholic, or something else? If not, then try to avoid very religious words & phrases that they may not understand, such as: The parish, the sacraments, and conversion. If you do need to use religious words, try to explain what you mean by them *Talk personally and avoid telling others what to do.* We do not all have the same faith experience and people are at different stages in their journey. So, respect this and try to avoid 'preaching' to others about what they must do, as this can make people feel defensive. Stick to talking about your own story and leave them with something to think about. Avoid arguments. Sharing faith is about winning hearts, not winning arguments.

4) Don't be afraid to be vulnerable

It is hard to relate to someone whose life appears to be perfect and without struggles. As Pope Francis put it so beautifully; *"The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful... I see the church as a field hospital after battle."* Let's be honest, we all have our struggles. When appropriate, sharing how God has helped you, or is helping you, through a difficulty (perhaps facing an illness, or a financial or relationship crisis) can bring great consolation and hope to people in their own struggles. Often in times of difficulty people are most open and aware of their need of God.

5) Take responsibility for your level of sharing

Don't share something deeply personal if you are uncomfortable about doing so and avoid sharing something about someone else without their permission. There is a time for sharing from the depths of our souls, but usually in close relationships, or if you have been asked to speak to a specific group of people about a specific topic. Once again, keep it simple.

6) Be aware of the response of the other person

Notice if they seem engaged and keen to know more, or if they seem distracted, or perhaps need to get to an appointment somewhere else. If that's the case, they may not be ready to receive your testimony so, out of respect for them, bring your sharing to a close.

7) Be yourself and speak naturally

We are different and God uses us to reach out to different people in different ways. There is nothing more off putting than insincerity, so just be yourself and share from your heart.

8) Listen

Yes, this is about sharing your faith. But the word *sharing* is important. If you want to have genuine communication with another, let them speak too. Let them ask questions, or even disagree with you. People have a real need to be heard and listening is an act of charity.

9) Be a witness to the Joy of the Gospel

There may be things about the Church, or our parish priest, or another member of the parish that we find difficult. But avoid moaning or complaining about your faith. A joyful person is much more attractive than a moaner! And we can always find something to be joyful and thankful about. Pope Francis says: *"An evangeliser must never look like they have just come back from a funeral"*. Let your love for Jesus show in your face, in your words and in your genuine care for the person with whom you are speaking. We may never know the impact of sharing our faith and telling our story, but, when we do, it has the power to change hearts!

Sharing your faith journey is as simple sharing of part of your story, to give witness to Christ.

Consider:- *What has God done in your life, in the past? How is God present in your life today? Why are you a Catholic? What does your faith mean to you personally?* Answering one of these, or similar questions, will give you an outline to share your faith journey. It is powerful because it demonstrates to others that God is real and he cares about our lives.

It is also something that we can, and really should, do!

BEGINNING – Introduce yourself and set the scene, briefly sharing some-thing about your life before the event(s) you want to speak about.

approx 150 words

MIDDLE – How did God intervene? If you are not able to recall a *significant event(s)*, consider some of those gradual steps where God has helped your faith journey.

approx 250 words

END – What has your life been like since?

approx 100 words

(This document is based on a one from St Peter's, Leamington Spa.)